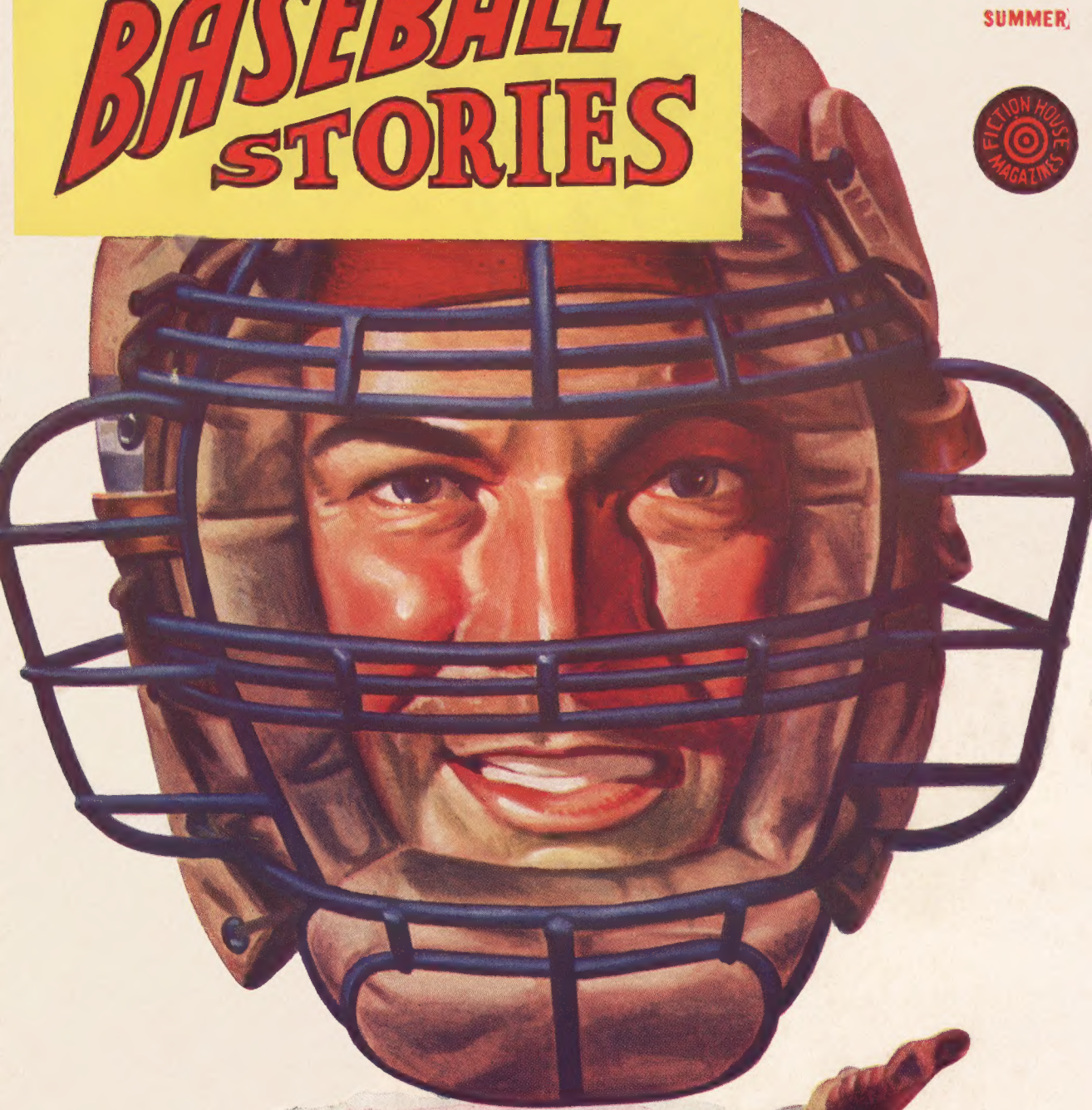


BASEBALL STORIES

20¢
SUMMER



BIG LEAGUE FACT and FICTION

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Almost thirty!"



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At thirty, forty is distant middle age.

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Fact and Fiction

BASEBALL

STORIES

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WONDER BOY

By Bill Heuman

Chuck had been rolled in the mud. But he wouldn't crawl and he wouldn't quit. The majors was his dish and he was comin' back. This time with a diamond bonanza—young Ad Preston—a paradise fireballer with a champion's heart.

HE came into the dressing room with his mask under his arm and a battered mitt dangling from the index finger of his left hand. He still wore the chest protector and knee pads.

"Nice game, Jack," the big first baseman called.

Chuck Gardner nodded and a faint smile slid across his brown, sweat-streaked face. He was on the short side, solid in the shoulders, legs a little bowed, and he walked stiffly, the result of twelve years crouching behind the plate.

"The name's Chuck," Charlie Gardner said without emotion. They didn't even know his name on this bush league outfit, but he didn't care. He sat down on the

wooden bench in front of his locker and unstrapped the knee pads. Sweat still dripped from his face because this had been a hot June afternoon.

Lou Slater, Mustang manager and owner, came in and handed him a ten dollar bill. Slater was a fat man with a partly bald head and a cigar in his mouth. He chewed on the cigar as he spoke, and the cigar was out.

"Three hits in four times ain't bad," Slater grinned. "If I had an opening, Gardner, I'd like to take you on for good."

"I got an offer up in Barnfield," Chuck told him. "Thanks anyway." He was thirty-two and he figured he'd played with



Chuck spun in his seat to get another look at the young hurler. This kid wasn't good—he was great.

that many clubs during the past dozen years. A man got around when he was barnstorming. He saw a lot of things and he got to know people. This Slater was a four-flusher—distinctly bush-league, trying to pretend he was running a big time outfit.

"A lot of boys from this club have gone places," the fat man was saying proudly. "You heard of Mickey Dunn, mister?"

"Kid with the Cougars?" Chuck asked without interest.

"He caught for me," Manager Lou Slater boasted.

Chuck nodded. Young Dunn was making out fairly good with the big-league club. He was young—as young as Chuck himself had been when he'd broken into the big time with the Grays.

Lou Slater was lighting the cigar as Chuck kicked off his spikes and wiggled his toes. The catcher glanced at him curiously. The fat man didn't remember that big '32 scandal, or if he did remember he'd forgotten about the little pepper-pot catcher who'd been implicated in that sensational investigation after the '32

Series between the Grays and the Cougars.

Even thinking of 1932 made Chuck feel a little sick inside. He hadn't been one of the Big Three—McNair, Anson and Campbell—who'd been thrown out of organized baseball. He was the little man, the rookie of whom much had been expected in that Series, but who had fallen down so dismally that he'd been included in the list of suspects.

Stripping off the Mustang uniform, Chuck slipped a towel around his waist and walked toward the shower room. He still had that wavy black hair, but it was thinner now than it had been in '32. The eyes were blue, colder than they'd been when he'd broken in with the Grays, twenty years old, with a burning fire inside of him. One reporter claimed that Chuck Gardner went to bed with his mitt.

"As far as I'm concerned," Jeff Partridge, Gray manager, had said when the story broke, "you're clear, kid. Nobody should expect a rookie to stand up with that much pressure on him and three of the regulars laying down."

THE baseball commissioner had been able to pin nothing on him. There were no canceled checks in his name signed by Leo Roth—the evidence on which McNair, Anson and big Doug Campbell had been convicted. But sports writers claimed there had been other Grays in on that deal with Roth, the gambler, and Chuck Gardner, who had played top-notch ball all season, had been a dud in the big Series—one hit in seven games, several passed-balls to his credit at times when a passed ball meant something.

Under the shower in the Mustang dressing room, Chuck stared at his hands. Several of the fingers had been broken, but it was that left wrist which had done the damage in the '32 Series. He'd sprained it, sliding into second base the first game, after his first hit, and he'd been finished from then on. He'd kept the sprain a secret because he didn't want to be benched in his first big Series, and Jeff Partridge kept him in, thinking he'd come out of the slump any day.

No one had ever learned about that bum wrist, and he'd gone through the Series with it, taking the punishment, and thinking, kid-like, that he could get by. That had been the mistake because he'd jeopardized the chances of the Grays.

The commissioner gave him a clean slate, but to the fans who had witnessed that Series, Chuck Gardner had laid down. A kid who had been rated one of the top-ranking backstoppers in the league, and his first year, had committed four errors in seven games, and one passed ball had lost a contest!

Chuck came out of the shower room five minutes later and walked back to his bench. He always felt better after the hot water bath as it took some of the stiffness from his body.

He glanced at some of the Mustang players curiously. They were typical minor league men—some very young, others older than himself, who had never made the grade, but still hoped. He'd run across this type of ball player in thirty-two out of the forty-eight states since quitting the Grays.

Jeff Partridge had wanted him to stay even after the fans started to ride him at the start of the next season. The scandal still fresh in their minds, Gray fans

had booed Chuck every time he came out of the dugout. It had broken him down; it affected his hitting and took the drive out of his legs.

They began to call him 'Leo's boy,' and he'd resigned from the team, knowing that he was through in the big time. He'd thought of quitting baseball altogether, and for one season he'd worked in a Ford plant, but after that he came back to barnstorm, picking up odd jobs here and there with semi-pro outfits and minor league clubs where they weren't too careful about eligibility rules.

Lou Slater's Mustangs needed a catcher for a week as the fat man's first string backstopper had split a finger. Slater paid ten dollars a game. He'd heard of Chuck through a semi-pro owner upstate.

"You want to stick around, Gardner?" Slater asked as Chuck packed his duds in a dilapidated brown valise. "I could use you for another day, kid."

"I'm catching for Barnfield tomorrow," Chuck explained. "I told them I'd be down." The Barnfield club had heard of him through someone else and the manager had called him up in the Mustang dressing room, offering fifteen dollars for a Sunday game. Chuck had accepted.

The catcher put on his brown felt hat and picked up the valise. He nodded to the watching Mustang players and walked toward the door. He seldom played in a town more than a week. After that some snooping local reporter would begin to ask questions. They'd nose around till they'd dug something up. Only twice in twelve years that had happened, and twice was two times too much.

"So long," Chuck said.

A few of the Mustangs mumbled after him. They were frankly curious, knowing that he was a good backstopper and wondering why he didn't settle down with a club. A man got nowhere hopping from town to town.

Chuck walked briskly down the street toward the bus station. The score had been low, and the game had ended quite early. It was only a quarter of five when he stepped aboard the bus and paid his fare to Barnfield, eighteen miles north.

Finding an empty seat in the rear of the bus he slipped into it and stared out the window. This was the real middle

west—small towns, connected by bus lines, plenty of farm land, fields of corn.

Chuck studied the scenery with little interest. He'd picked up a paper at the corner cigar store in town and he opened it to the sporting pages. The Grays were on top in the big time, with the batters just beginning to find their 'eyes,' and the pitchers losing the edge as spring waned. Jeff Partridge still held the managerial reins. Chuck wondered how the old man was. Partridge had been a square shooter.

It was a new Gray team Jeff Partridge handled this year with few of the boys Chuck had known in the old days. He wondered what had become of Skip McNair, Goldie Anson, and big Doug Campbell, the hurler. Once he'd heard that little McNair had played short for a semi-pro outfit on the coast the week before Chuck had caught a few games for the same club.

Closing the paper after a few minutes, he looked out the window again. They were moving through another small town, stopping once to pick up a passenger, and then going out of that town.

THERE were cars parked along the highway a mile out of town, and Chuck caught a glimpse of a two-story wooden building high up on a ridge back off the road. The structure seemed quite old, gray-painted, with a bell tower. A sign was nailed over the door, black with gold letters. Chuck read: COE ACADEMY.

The bus was slowing down again to pick up another passenger when Chuck spotted the baseball field, a large neatly-mown lawn with a backstop and a few rows of wooden benches. There was no enclosure, most of the spectators reclining on the grass out in right and center field.

Two kid teams were on the field—high school boys—and they were talking it up in lively fashion. With the bus window opened slightly Chuck could hear them. He grinned.

The scoreboard to the left of the backstop indicated that Coe Academy was defeating Neville High by 3 to 0 in the eighth with Neville at bat and a rangy, dark-haired kid throwing for Coe.

The batter was digging in as the bus driver slid the gear into first. Then the

Coe pitcher started to wind up. He was probably five feet eleven and must have weighed one hundred and seventy-five pounds. Chuck immediately liked the looseness this boy was displaying.

The bus went into second with a grinding rattle and Chuck had to turn his head a little to see the pitch go in. He had been smiling a little to himself as this kid pitcher wound up, but the smile suddenly disappeared as the white pellet darted down the strip of dirt.

Open-mouthed, Chuck stared. The Neville batter had waved his bat as the ball zipped by him, but he may have been waving at a Mustang fighter plane doing six hundred miles an hour and thirty thousand feet over his head. That was as close as he came to hitting the ball.

Chuck found his voice just as the bus went into high.

"Hold it!" he gasped, scooping up his valise. He raced down the aisle to the door and the bus driver stared at him distastefully.

"You bought a ticket for Barnfield, bud," the man growled. "Change your mind?"

"That's right," Chuck said. "I'm getting off here." He hopped out quickly when the door slammed open. He ran around the bus nearly losing his hat in his excitement. He was nearly knocked down by a car going the other way. The driver honked at him angrily as he shot across the road.

The kid was winding up again as Chuck stepped between two parked cars. Once more that white pill hurtled toward the plate and the Neville batter watched it go by without taking his bat from his shoulders. It was a third strike and he walked away, shaking his head in disgust.

Chuck Gardner sank down on the grass in the outfield, breathing very fast, eyes wide. He'd caught big Doug Campbell when the burly Scot had won twenty-nine games for the Grays in the big time, and Campbell, a fast ball pitcher, had never thrown a baseball with more speed than this Coe Academy pitcher!

The Coe team was shooting the ball around the infield, the shortstop dropping it in his excitement. Chuck stared around the field. There couldn't have been more than a hundred or so spectators along the

few wooden benches and sitting on the grass, and most of these were probably kids from Coe with a few from Neville.

A red-headed, freckle-faced boy with a big "C" on his baseball cap, sat a few yards from Chuck. He was chewing on a blade of grass.

"How's the score, Johnny?" Chuck asked to make conversation.

The kid looked at the scoreboard. "Three, nuthin'," he said. "Ad's got 'em."

"Ad the pitcher?"

The red-head nodded. "He struck out nineteen of 'em."

Chuck Gardner took off his hat and wiped the sweat from his face with a handkerchief. He knew that down here in the sticks—this tiny local prep school—he'd found something that every big-league scout would have given his right arm for.

"Ad lost any games this year?" Chuck asked next.

The red-head looked at him as if he were crazy. "Ad ain't lost a game since he's pitchin' for Coe."

"He strike out nineteen every game?" Chuck grinned.

"Once," the boy chuckled, "he fanned twenty-three fellers over in Creighton. Ad Preston's the best pitcher this school ever had, mister."

Chuck nodded. These kids didn't seem to realize that Ad Preston was good enough to be mowing them down in the big time.

Ad Preston had the ball once more and he was waiting for the next Neville batsman. Preston seemed quite a bit taller and heavier than the other Coe kids. They were small and young even for a prep school team, and Chuck assumed the school had a very small enrollment and hence just a few candidates to pick from.

A group of kids on the bench began to whoop it up and Ad turned his head a little to grin at them. Chuck got a good look at his face. He was young—probably no more than seventeen, a nice-looking kid, a little embarrassed at the cheers.

"Ad come from a farm?" Chuck asked suddenly. He'd noticed something that hadn't been apparent before. This boy had a pair of very solid shoulders, accounting for the terrific speed with which he heaved the ball.

"Ad's mother has a little chicken farm up along the Barnfield road," the red-

headed boy explained. He asked suddenly, "You know him, mister?"

"No," Chuck said, but he knew that he would before the day was over. This awkward boy with the black hair and the nice smile was worth a fortune to the finder. The Lions had paid young Dick Haines twenty-five thousand dollars to sign a Lion contract before Haines had ever thrown a baseball in the big time. Chuck had seen Haines in the minor leagues, and this Ad Preston was a better thrower!

The Neville kid at the plate stuck out his bat at the first ball Preston threw. The ball cut the heart of the platter and it met the kid's stick solidly, arcing out over third base for a clean single.

The red-head muttered something under his breath, but Chuck grinned. That hit had been the luckiest thing the Neville boy had ever done. Literally, Preston had hit his bat with the ball.

"How many they make off Ad?" Chuck asked.

"That's the second hit," the Coe boy said. "Last week Ad pitched a no-hitter against Barnfield High."

Ad Preston got the next batsman on an easy roller to the box. The Neville boy barely touched the ball with his stick.

II

CHUCK GARDNER got up and started to walk around the field toward the benches along the sidelines. The Coe team raced in for the last half of the eighth. Ad would have another inning to pitch and Chuck wanted to get up closer—even behind the backstop if possible and see what the boy was throwing. There were a few kids behind the backstop and he didn't think anyone would object.

Passing the Coe bench Chuck got a look at young Preston. Chuck noticed the hands. They were big, long-fingered, and the wrists were strong.

"Give me a farm kid any day," Jeff Partridge always said. "Find me one of 'em who's not muscle-bound and I'll show you a pitcher."

This Ad Preston wasn't muscle-bound. Chuck could see that the way he walked around; it was evident in the looseness out

on the mound. His muscles were like whip-cord in the shoulders and arms.

The Coe team went down in order, and then took the field for the first of the ninth. Chuck walked around the back-stop and stood looking through the screen.

Ad threw a few warm-up balls and then walked off the mound till the batter came into the box. The first pitch was shoulder high and the batter missed it cleanly. The ball shot past the catcher's head, topping his glove, and struck the screen a foot away from Chuck's face. Instinctively, Chuck ducked.

"Hold 'em, Barney," one boy called. "What's the matter with you?"

Barney, the catcher, turned around and glared through the bars of the mask. Chuck grinned at him, knowing that this boy had probably been fighting all afternoon to hold that small white pea as it whizzed toward him.

Ad fanned the first batter on three pitched balls, using a little hook the third pitch. Aside from that terrific speed, Preston didn't have very much. The hook was only a wrinkle, but Chuck knew that with a little instruction that hook would sweep and break with blinding power. A pitcher could learn to throw hooks, but speed was a gift—something you were born with. You had it or you didn't.

Preston got the next kid on a fly to the infield, and he fanned the third, ending the game. As he walked in toward the bench, the Coe kids mobbed him.

Chuck Gardener waited around for a few minutes, and then, knowing that he wouldn't be able to see Preston privately, walked back toward the road. The Coe team went back to the school house to change their clothes.

Chuck saw the teacher-coach walking up ahead and he caught up with the man.

"Preston pitched a nice game," Chuck said.

The coach nodded, peering at the catcher through his glasses. "Ad's a good boy," he said absently. "We'll be sorry to lose him."

"He graduates this year?" Chuck asked.

"Next week," the coach explained. "The only thing I regret is that he won't be going on to college."

Chuck caught his breath. That had been one factor he never considered.

"What do the boys work at up here?" he asked finally.

The teacher shook his head sadly. "Most of them end up in the cannery," he murmured, "over in Barnfield. It pays well in the beginning and they fall for the good wages, but that's as far as they go."

Chuck left the man and inquired the way to the Preston farm.

He was on the Barnfield road when a rattling jalopy shot past him, packed with boys. He caught a glimpse of Ad Preston's laughing face.

The Preston farm was another quarter of a mile down the road, and Chuck was sweating freely when he reached it. The building was very old, sadly in need of paint. An attempt had been made to beautify the place with flowers. There were several beds of them and a piece of lawn in front of the house.

The chicken houses were to the rear and these, too, were in bad shape. The Prestons didn't seem to be making a go of the chicken business, and then Chuck remembered that the kid on the field had mentioned only Ad Preston's mother, not the father.

The kid hadn't mentioned a sister either, but the girl coming out of the front door was undoubtedly that. She was older than Ad, probably twenty-three or four, brown-haired where the kid pitcher's hair was dark, but they both had the same brown eyes and the expression around the mouth.

Chuck started to walk toward the porch, wondering just what he was going to do. He'd never done any scouting before; he represented no big league club, or even minor league team. He had nothing to offer young Preston.

"Good afternoon," the girl smiled.

Chuck nodded and set down the valise. "Kind of warm," he said. "Ad around?"

The smile left the sister's face. "Has he done anything?" she asked quickly, the worry coming into the brown eyes.

Chuck grinned. "He just struck out twenty-two batters and allowed two hits," he said.

The sister stared at him a moment and then smiled again. "Oh—baseball," she said.

Chuck caught a glimpse of Ad Preston, in overalls, hurrying down toward the chicken houses with two pails of water.

"I—I thought I might have a job to offer your brother," Chuck said lamely.

Miss Preston nodded. "Will you come inside?" she asked. "Mother would like to meet you, Mr. —."

"Gardner," Chuck said. "Charles Gardner." He went into the house with her and it was cool. He caught a whiff of food from the kitchen and it smelled good.

Miss Preston smiled at him as he wrinkled his nose hungrily.

"You may stay for supper if you wish, Mr. Gardner. Mother will have it ready in a few minutes."

MRS. PRESTON poked her head out through the kitchen door. She was a gray-haired lady, thin, frail, but smiling. Immediately, Chuck liked her.

"You are very welcome," Mrs. Preston said. "Set out another plate, Elva."

Chuck liked the name. It was a little unusual, but it fitted this quiet-faced girl with the brown eyes.

"I should warn you," Elva smiled as she walked to an old walnut china closet, "that Ad has his heart set on working in the cannery."

"I see," Chuck murmured. He'd set the valise on the floor and was standing near the door with his hat in his hand. They'd taken his acceptance for granted. He remembered that it had been a long time since he'd eaten a home-made meal.

"Sit down, Mr. Gardner," the girl told him, nodding toward a chair. "Does Ad know you're here?"

"I don't believe he does," Chuck said. "There's nothing definite about my proposition as yet, but—" He trailed off.

"You have a proposition?" Miss Preston asked quietly. Immediately, Chuck sensed she was on the alert, wary. He knew that this girl was handling the business end of the chicken farm.

"It's like this," Chuck said. "I saw your brother pitching this afternoon and I think he can make a lot of money in baseball."

Elva didn't seem very enthused. "Mother and I wanted to send him to college, but Ad turned it down. We're running in the red with the farm and Ad wants to help out on the money end. That's the reason he took that job at the cannery."

"The baseball season runs from April to October," Chuck explained. "I've known plenty of fellows who went to college during the winter to get their degrees." He knew that had gone home because he saw her eyes widen.

"You mean it's possible for a man to make enough money in baseball during the summer so that he can go to school the winter months?"

Chuck nodded. "From what I've seen Ad will go a long way in the game."

The mother came into the room carrying a bowlful of potatoes. She looked curiously at Chuck and he knew she'd heard the last part of the conversation.

"Are you a baseball player, Mr. Gardner?" she asked slowly.

"That's right," Chuck told her.

"Have you made a lot of money?" Elva asked him.

Chuck reddened under the tan. "No," he admitted, "partly because I never had your brother's ability."

"He's very young," Mrs. Preston put in. "It doesn't seem possible."

Ad came in through the kitchen door. He shook hands with Chuck when they were introduced, and his mouth opened in surprise when Elva told him the visitor was a baseball player.

"A pro?"

"I'm playing up in Barnfield tomorrow," Chuck said, "with the Plovers."

Ad's eyes sparkled. "I wouldn't mind playing a little baseball myself after graduation," he murmured, "but I don't suppose I'll have much time with the job at the cannery and the chores around here."

"How much are they offering at the cannery?" Chuck asked him.

"Twenty-two a week," Ad said proudly.

"And they earn it," Elva put in grimly. "If you'd listen to me, Ad—"

Ad was shaking his head and Chuck admired him for it. This kid was taking over a man's job at the cannery because he knew they needed the cash on the farm.

"We can talk it over while we're eating," Mrs. Preston smiled.

Chuck sat down on one of the chairs, feeling small himself. He'd gone after young Preston because he saw a big opportunity of making some cash. A big league scout would grab the kid and sign him to a contract in ten minutes, reserving

for himself a good ten per cent commission of the money a club paid for the boy's contract.

There was a picture on the wall of a strapping young fellow with handle-bar mustaches. He was dressed in one of the old time baseball uniforms with collar and straw hat.

"That's Dad," Ad chuckled. "He was a ball player, too, Mr. Gardner."

"Your father never had much time to play baseball," Mrs. Preston smiled, "but he did play once in a while over in Barnfield." She said to Chuck, "Mr. Preston has been dead over fifteen years now."

Chuck nodded in sympathy. He could see this little old woman carrying on the farm with two small children, raising them and never complaining about it. Now the children were trying to take over. It was a nice thing.

"Have you done much pitching, Ad?" Chuck asked.

"Just with the Academy," the boy explained, "and nights out in the back."

"He has a mattress tacked up against the rear wall of one of the chicken houses," Elva explained, "and he's been throwing baseballs at it since he was nine years old."

Chuck Gardner's eyes flickered for a moment. "I'd like to see that mattress," he murmured.

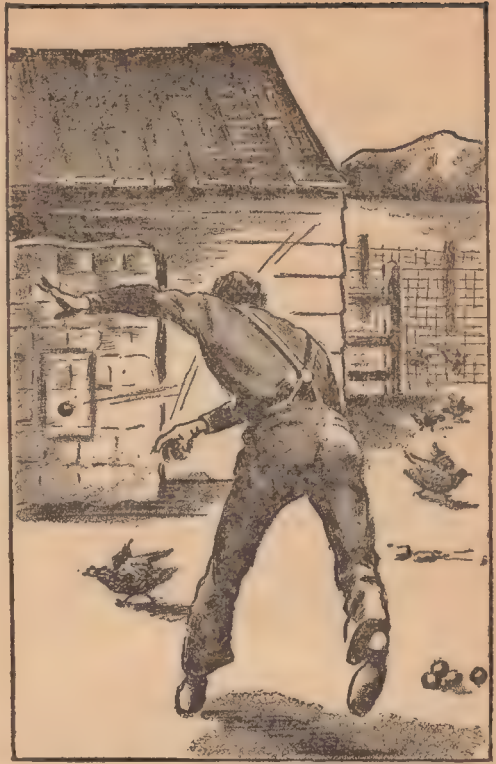
"It's kind of battered now," Ad grinned. "Barney O'Hare, the catcher at the Academy, lives way over in Pittstown and he can't get up this way to catch for me, and I wanted to practice."

They went out to the chicken house after supper while the women cleaned up the dishes. Chuck took a look at the old mattress nailed up on the rear wall. Young Preston had painted a rectangle on it, vaguely representing the square from the knees to the shoulders of a batsman, and as wide as the average plate. There were a half dozen old baseballs lying on the ground in front of the mattress, most of them had been taped a number of times and were as heavy as rocks.

"You throw these?" Chuck asked, picking one up.

"I got them at the school," Ad said, "after they were thrown out."

Chuck shook his head, went back to the porch and got his valise. Ad stared as



Ad had developed beautiful control throwing at a mattress.

the catcher took out the mitt, sponge, and a baseball.

"Throw me a few," Chuck said.

"Say! You a catcher, mister?"

"That's right," Chuck smiled. "How's your arm feel?"

"I can throw all day. That game this afternoon was nothing."

"Take it easy," Chuck told him. "Warm up slow, and then let me have a few fast ones."

Ad ran toward the house and came back a moment later with a glove.

"I never warmed up before with a pro," the kid said. "Hope I don't throw too many in the dirt."

Chuck had noticed that the boy's control seemed to be very good which was an unusual thing. Most kids coming up had that trouble, and with many of them it took years to get over it. Some never did.

Ad threw a half dozen balls, making each one go in a little faster.

"Not yet," Chuck called. "Wait till your arm is well loosened."

Ad nodded. Ten minutes later he began to open up and Chuck felt the ball

sting through the sponge. Very few times had he had that experience. This boy was throwing the ball fully as hard as big Doug Campbell had thrown at his peak, and he had more of a rise on it!

"Let's see that hook," Chuck said once, his eyes glowing.

Ad threw a few hooks and most of them were mere wrinkles, but once he got a terrific bend on it and the ball nearly got away from Chuck.

"**T**HAT'S enough," Chuck called. He walked forward, sliding the glove from his left hand and looking at the red palm. The kid had been throwing nearly all strikes—over the heart of the plate, and that was bad. He'd probably thought that was a pitcher's task to cut the middle every time, and he'd worked with that idea in mind while throwing at the mattress.

"You telegraph all your throws," Chuck said mildly. "I knew when you were going to throw the fast one, and I knew when you'd try a hook. A smart batter would wait for those pitches and swat them."

Ad's jaw dropped. Chuck grinned and clapped him on the shoulder. He didn't want this kid to get a swelled head, and he didn't know how the boy would react to excess praise. Looking at the mattress and those rock-like balls lying around, Chuck realized he'd never met a kid who deserved more praise. Ad Preston was a self-made baseball player.

"Would you like to play ball for a living, Ad?" Chuck asked suddenly, "and make real money?"

Preston slapped his glove a few times. "You kidding, mister?" he asked quietly.

"No," Chuck said. "I believe you can go places."

"I wanted to go to college," Ad said slowly, "but I never told mother or sis that. If I don't take that cannery job we'll have to sell out. The price of feed is away up and the price of eggs way down."

"I guess that's how it usually is," Chuck said sympathetically.

"If we had cash," Ad was saying, "we could make money out of this place. I'd get in better grades of chickens; I'd buy new incubators, and go in for selling pullets. That's where the real money is these days."

"I'm telling you," Chuck said, "you can make it playing baseball. I'll get you the jobs in the beginning and I'll sign you up for a decent salary with a league club somewhere."

Ad Preston looked at him quickly. "Will you catch for me, Mr. Gardner?"

"I can do that, too," Chuck grinned, "if you want it that way."

"Then it's a go," Ad smiled. "I was really scared of that cannery job. Everybody gets muscle-bound there sooner or later, and that would ruin my pitching."

"You understand," Chuck told him, "that if you make good in this game you'll have plenty of time for college during the winter."

"Boy!" Ad gasped. "I never thought of that."

"Why not take a run up to Barnfield with me tomorrow," Chuck said.

"All right," Ad nodded. "I'd like to see a ball game. I don't get much time."

Back at the house the boy told them the news. Chuck sat in a corner of the living room, saying nothing, but he saw Elva's eyes on him several times.

"I'm going to take a chance playing professional baseball," Ad said quietly. "Mr. Gardner thinks I'll make good, and that I'll make much more money than I can get in the cannery."

Chuck said to the mother, "If Ad doesn't do well I'll send him home in a month and he can still take that job at the cannery."

Mrs. Preston looked at Elva.

"Do you have any kind of a contract, Mr. Gardner?" the girl asked.

Chuck was surprised. "I can make one up," he said, thinking then that it would be a good idea anyway in case a chiseling scout came along and tried to inveigle them into signing papers. There would be plenty of scouts around the day after Ad Preston was unveiled. Chuck was sure of that.

Elva got out paper and pen and placed them on the dining room table. Chuck wrote a few clauses after some consideration. He was to handle Ad Preston's affairs for an indefinite period while he was playing baseball. He was to guarantee Ad at least twenty-five dollars per week for the one month period. It was a ridiculous sum and Chuck knew it, but he included that clause anyway, knowing how

important that money was to the Prestons.

The final clause indicated that Ad was to sign no other contracts without Chuck's permission. The catcher handed the paper to Elva even before Ad saw it himself. He saw the girl stare at him when she came to the money clause. Evidently she hadn't expected that he would guarantee Ad a salary.

"It sounds all right," she said dubiously. "Of course we wouldn't hold you to any kind of contract wherein you had to pay Ad a salary if he didn't earn it."

"I'm not worrying," Chuck smiled. He'd been averaging over fifty a week for years.

Mrs. Preston had to sign the contract for her son, and then Ad signed above Chuck's name. To make it legal Chuck asked them to call in a nearby neighbor as a witness.

"So I'm really going to be a pro!" Ad mumbled when it was all over.

"We'll soon find out," Chuck smiled.

They invited him to stay overnight before going on to Barnfield, and Chuck accepted. Ad went up to bed early as he had to get up at five in the morning to start on the chores. Chuck paused at the door of the living room, saw that Elva had a question on her lips. Mrs. Preston had left the room for a moment.

"Why are you doing this, Mr. Gardner?" the girl asked quietly.

Chuck shrugged. "I believe I can recognize talent when I see it," he explained, "and your brother has talent. I'd hate to see it wasted in a cannery."

"There's nothing in that contract for you," Elva remarked, "and you've even obligated yourself to pay Ad money if he doesn't earn it himself."

"I wouldn't worry about that," Chuck smiled. "He'll earn it."

"I hope so," the girl murmured. "You have no idea how bad things are here. We've been borrowing money to keep the farm going."

"I think," Chuck said slowly, "I see better days ahead for the Prestons." He left late the next morning with Ad, taking the bus into Barnfield. Elva had intimated that she'd be over later in the afternoon to watch the game.

"I have to know more about it from now on," the sister explained.

III

THE BARNFIELD PLOVERS, semi-pros, were run by a big Irishman named Harrigan. The Plovers needed a catcher for the afternoon's doubleheader and Harrigan was willing to pay fifteen dollars for the job.

Chuck made two for four in the first game, knocking in the winning runs with a line single over short, and then three out of five in the second tilt as Ad Preston howled from the grandstand. The Plovers took both ends of the doubleheader.

Late in the second game Chuck discovered Elva sitting with her brother. She smiled when he nodded to her.

In the dressing room Harrigan boomed: "We got two games on Tuesday, Gardner. That's a state holiday up this way. You want to stick around?"

"Who's coming here?" Chuck wanted to know.

"West Coast All-Stars," Harrigan grinned. "They're makin' a tour of these states."

Chuck nodded. "I'll be in town," he said. Then he added as Harrigan turned away. "You hear of a kid named Preston pitching for Coe Academy?"

The Irishman grinned. "Threw a no-hitter a while ago," he laughed. "I'll have to look up that boy some day."

Chuck smiled as Harrigan made his way through the dressing room. The Plover manager had lost the opportunity of a life time.

On Tuesday afternoon Chuck walked into the Plover dressing room with Ad at his side. The kid was nervous. He carried a big paper bag with his uniform and spikes rolled up in it.

Chuck nabbed Harrigan when he came through the door.

"I brought a kid along," the catcher said. "You'll be short on pitchers today if these West Coast men start to hit. Why not give him a try?"

Harrigan looked at the high school boy curiously. "Where you from, kid?" he asked.

"Coe," Ad told him.

"You ain't Preston?"

"That's right," the boy said. He looked at Chuck Gardner.

"You could try him out," Chuck said,

"if you run short today, Jack."

"Sure," Harrigan chuckled. He clapped Ad on the shoulder. "You'll find these guys ain't high school hitters. Good luck."

"Don't worry about it," Chuck murmured. "Every guy carries but one bat at the plate, and it's not very wide."

They went out on the field and Chuck heard a rasping voice out on the infield. The West Coast All-Stars were working out. That voice had a familiar ring to it, bringing Chuck back to something he'd been trying to forget for a good many years. The catcher turned around slowly.

Skip McNair, former Gray shortstop, was cavorting on the infield, an older Skip, but the same pointed, sharp-nosed face, and the narrow green eyes. McNair must have been all of thirty-eight now.

Mechanically, Chuck's eyes swiveled over to first base, half-expecting what he found. Big Goldie Anson, ex-Gray first sacker, was over there. Anson had been the leading slugger in the majors at the time of the Series scandal. He'd been hitting a mean .378 that year, with thirty-eight home runs to his credit. He was a big man, heavy in the shoulders, and that crop of blond hair was getting thin.

Chuck located the third man of the trio sitting in the dugout, mopping his red face. Doug Campbell, burly Gray pitcher, was at least thirty pounds heavier than he'd been with the Grays and he had been a two hundred pounder then. Campbell was the only one who looked a great deal different. He was fat in the face and around the waist, and from the general appearance Chuck was positive the big man had grown to like his beer too much.

Harrigan passed Chuck and the catcher called to him. "The All-Stars ever play here before?"

"First time out this way," Harrigan said. "Maybe you remember some of these guys, Gardner. They were in that '32 mess—" Harrigan stopped suddenly. He'd been pulling a handkerchief out of his pocket and he had it halfway out. "Hey—" he muttered softly.

"That's right," Chuck stated coldly. "There was a fellow named Gardner supposed to be in on that deal."

"You're the guy," Harrigan mumbled.

"I was cleared," Chuck said.

"Sure," Harrigan told him. "It don't

mean anything to me, kid. You're playin' ball here." He stared across the field to watch McNair scoop up a ground ball. McNair was only a shadow of the great infielder who had dazzled big-league crowds. "A funny thing," he laughed, "you guys comin' together again on my field!"

"It's a small world," Chuck agreed.

Ten minutes later McNair spotted him. The shortstop was coming in for his hits when he saw Chuck warming up with Ad.

"The old pepper-pot," McNair grinned. "Can you beat it? How's 'Leo's boy'?"

"Hello, Skip," Chuck said without emotion. During the investigation he remembered that these three men hadn't cleared or accused him because they didn't know. Leo Roth had handled things very cleverly and it was for that reason sports writers and the public thought there had been others in on that bribe.

"Hey—Goldie!" Skip called across the field.

Anson came over, grinning. Chuck had never liked any of these men on the Grays. Anson had been overbearing with rookies and Chuck had been a rookie that year. Skip McNair always had a nasty word for a man, and the dour Campbell didn't like anyone but himself.

"Like old times," Anson said. "We heard you quit the Grays the next year, Gardner. What happened?" He was grinning as he said it.

"See any more of Roth?" McNair asked softly. "You were a lucky guy, Chuck."

"I didn't take any dirty money," Chuck said slowly. "Keep that in mind, gentlemen."

"You put on a pretty good show," McNair snapped. "What happened in that third game, my friend?"

Chuck bit his lips. The third game of that Series he'd lost by letting a ball get by him with the winning run on third base. That passed ball, ironically enough, had led to the investigation. It had looked that bad.

Ad Preston was standing sixty feet away and he couldn't hear what was going on. The kid stood with the ball in his hands, rubbing it, waiting for Chuck to get ready.

"We owe you plenty, kid," Anson

growled. "If it hadn't been for you there wouldn't have been any trouble."

"Somebody would have caught up with you sooner or later," Chuck said. "Rotteness doesn't go unrewarded."

Anson laughed grimly. "I hope for your sake you ain't blockin' the plate when I'm comin' in today."

"I'll block it," Chuck told him quietly. The bell was ringing for the Plovers to take the field for practice. McNair and Anson walked over to their dugout and Chuck saw them talking with Doug Campbell. The big pitcher shook his head several times, and Chuck knew what he had to expect when he stood up to the plate. Campbell was an ace-high bean-baller.

CAMPBELL started to warm up later and Chuck sat on the Plover bench, watching him. The Scot didn't have much left, but he could still throw a ball at a man's head.

Jack Harrigan glanced at Chuck several times, but the catcher was sure he hadn't said anything to the other men about Chuck's past. If any others had put two and two together, no one mentioned it, and Chuck was glad for young Ad's sake.

Elva Preston was in the grandstand again with a capacity crowd out to watch the Coast All-Stars. Harrigan started Donlan, his ace thrower, and the Stars went to work on him in the first inning. Goldie Anson laced a long drive over the right field wall with two men aboard to give the Stars a substantial lead, and they were never headed.

Chuck faced Campbell the first time in the second inning. He came up with a runner on second and two away. Skip McNair started to yell from short, and Campbell grinned.

Chuck went down in the dirt from the first pitch. He got up without a word, and then Campbell put another one at his head which drove him back.

Smiling, Chuck stood on the outside of the rectangle as if afraid of the next one. When Campbell put it down the middle, the catcher stepped across and swatted it over second for a clean base bit, scoring the runner.

Standing on first base, Chuck said mildly, "That big bum over there never could throw."

YOUNGEST BATTING CHAMP

Pete Reiser is the youngest of a long line of National League batting champs. The ex-Brooklyn center fielder was only 22 in 1941 when he topped the circuit's swatters with a mark of .343. He thus joined Arky Vaughan in the thin ranks of those who have led the old league's hitters at less than 24 years of age. Vaughan was 23 when he paced the loop with a .385 mark for Pittsburgh in 1935.

Several sluggers of the past won the National League batting championship when they were 24 years old. This list includes Ed Roush, Cincinnati, 1917; Rogers Hornsby, St. Louis, 1920; and Paul Waner, Pittsburgh, in 1927.

Hans Wagner won his first batting championship at 26 in 1900 and his last at 37 in 1911. Bubbles Hargrave, Cincinnati, was 34 when he rode the crest in 1926, while Lefty O'Doul was 36 when he copped the second of his two championships, in 1932, when with Brooklyn.

Goldie Anson skipped off the bag, came back and nearly caught Chuck with his spike. Anson's heavy left foot jabbed down, aiming for Chuck's ankle. The catcher pulled the leg away and then calmly spat on Anson's shoe.

"You little louse!" Goldie roared.

"You were always a four-flusher," Chuck told him. He was ready in case Anson swung on him, but the big first baseman heard a few boos from the stands and let the thing ride.

In the fifth inning Campbell again threw for Chuck's head, and the catcher waited till he got a good ball, slapping out a lone two bagger to left-center.

Ad's eyes were shining as Chuck came into the dugout after scoring the second Plover run. It was 4 to 2 for the All-Stars.

"I didn't think you were that good, Mr. Gardner," the high-school boy grinned.

Jack Harrigan heard the remark. He opened his mouth to say something, looked at Chuck, and then closed it again.

The Stars took the first game by a 6-to-3 margin. Campbell coasting through. The big Scot still had control.

Harrigan started his left-hander, Sammy Barton, in the second, and Barton was hammered from the mound in the first inning. McNair doubled and Anson tripled with men aboard. Reluctantly, Chuck had to admit that the two ex-big

leaguers could still slap the pill. Their legs had gone back on them and they were slow in the field, but the old batting eye was there.

Sitting in the dugout the end of the first inning, Chuck unstrapped the knee-pads and called to Harrigan:

"Want to let this kid warm up?"

The Plover manager turned around in surprise, having forgotten about young Preston completely.

"Oh—I!" he mumbled. "Okay, Gardner, send him out. I got nobody else if Lewis gets hit."

Ad walked out to right field where the bullpen catcher was sitting in the shade of a fence. Chuck noticed that the catcher didn't get up when Ad came out, and the kid was afraid to ask him.

"Get that bum up out there," Chuck scowled at Harrigan. "The boy needs to be loose if he's going in."

Harrigan cupped his hands and roared, nearly knocking the catcher off his seat. Ad had been instructed to throw easy until he was called into the box. He began to warm up.

"You'll be in," Chuck assured him. "This Lewis will be getting his in a few innings." The Stars, he'd noticed, had quite a few good stickers on the club in addition to McNair and Anson.

Mike Lewis allowed four hits in succession in the fifth inning. He passed two men, and then another slapped a triple. With the score 9 to 2 for the Stars, the crowd started to boo Harrigan.

Chuck stepped out of the box and looked toward the bench. Harrigan was standing up, hands on hips, perplexed. Then he waved to Lewis and the pitcher shoved his glove in his hip pocket and took the long walk to the showers.

"How's that kid?" Harrigan asked anxiously. "I don't like to see him get it too bad his first pro start. It ain't good for a boy."

"Look," Chuck grinned. "Go back to the bench, Jack, and hang onto your seat."

Ad was looking toward them, and Chuck waved his hand. The kid came in hurriedly, trotting a little, and Chuck said:

"Next time you walk from the pen—and slow."

"All right, Mr. Gardner," Ad mumbled. He was scared stiff, his face a little pale.

He held the ball in his hand which he'd brought in from the bull pen and he was rubbing it nervously.

Chuck took the ball from him and tossed it toward the dugout. He handed the boy the new ball which had just been thrown in.

"You warmed up all right, kid?" the catcher asked. "Did you throw any fast ones?"

"Not yet," Ad admitted. "You told me to take it easy."

"Good," Chuck said. "Here are your signals. One for the fast ball, and two for the hook, but you'll be getting mostly 'one.' Just let it ride in nice and easy."

The announcer was giving the change. "Ad Preston of Coe Academy." The crowd laughed and somebody called:

"You robbin' the kindergarten, Harrigan?"

"These fellows are pretty good, aren't they?" Ad muttered. "They can hit."

"They're bums," Chuck assured him, "else they wouldn't be where they are."

He went back to the plate and Ad threw a half dozen balls to him. The last one came in pretty fast.

Chuck glanced toward the stands where Elva was sitting. He could see her face, a little angry as the crowd started to work on the kid. They didn't mean any harm, but they'd come out for a good time, and the Plovers were taking it anyway.

"Show 'em how you did it at Coe," one fan yelled. "Strike 'em out, kid!"

Johnny Slade, Star second sacker, was in the rectangle with none away and a runner on third base as Ad toed the rubber and started his windup.

"Watch it, Johnny!" a fan roared.

The ball sailed six feet over Chuck's head and slapped into the wire netting to the rear. The Star runner from third scored as Chuck retrieved the ball. He grinned at Ad through the bars of the mask.

"Now we go, kid," he called.

Young Preston threw the second pitch into the dirt, hitting inches in front of the rubber. Chuck took it against his chest protector and he felt it.

Johnny Slade went out of the box, grinning a little. "What do we have out there, Gardner?" he asked.

"You'll find out, friend," Chuck assured

him. He took off the mask and walked out to the mound. Ad Preston was wilting, shoulders drooping, the sweat on his face. His eyes were very wild.

Jack Harrigan was out on the edge of the dugout, watching grimly, a little displeased. The two thousand fans in the ball park were giving it to the manager with a will.

"I can't get it over, Mr. Gardner," Ad whispered. "That never happened before."

"And it won't happen again," Chuck smiled. "Make out you're throwing at that mattress, Ad. Forget about the man at the bat. I'm telling you he won't hit it when it goes in."

Ad looked at him for a moment and then nodded. "All right," he said.

Chuck went back to the plate, and the umpire murmured. "He's too young, Gardner. Buck fever."

"Watch him," Chuck said, "and duck if I miss 'em."

AD PRESTON wound up and the ball sped down the alley. Johnny Slade wasn't quite ready for it. He swung but very late, missing completely. The crowd yelled in derision, but Slade's eyes were wide as he stepped out of the rectangle.

"How about that?" Chuck grinned. "Pretty fast, kid?"

Slade said, "It must be my eyes."

"With bi-focals," Chuck told him, "you couldn't get a look at that, Johnny, and if you could you'd be up in the big time."

"Nuts," Slade said sourly.

Ad wound up again, this time opening up. The ball spanked into Chuck's black mitt and Slade's bat never moved. The ball cut the heart of the plate for strike two.

A man in the stands yelled, "Wow!" The others didn't say much, but Chuck could see them sitting forward on their seats.

"One more, Ad," Chuck yelled. He gave the 'one' signal.

Slade cut this time but very late again, and Chuck whipped the pill down to first. Slade had gone down on three straight strikes without even touching the ball.

Ad waited for the ball to come back to him. He looked better now. He even grinned as Chuck came out and tossed the ball to him.

"Throw it where you see my glove, kid," the catcher whispered.

McNair was coming up, swinging two bats, grinning a little. "I'll take some of that fast stuff," he growled.

"You won't like it," Chuck told him.

McNair fouled off the first pitch which was a hook. He let another go by, and then cut at the fast one. The ball was in Chuck's glove before McNair got his bat around. A moment later Skip McNair went down swinging at another fast one, the ball rising over his bat.

"What a hop!" the umpire gasped.

McNair threw his stick toward the Star dugout and walked after it, swearing under his breath. Goldie Anson stepped into the rectangle, unsmiling. He'd seen Slade and McNair go down before those fast ones and he was wary.

"Watch your head, Goldie," Chuck whispered. "This kid's wild as a bat." It had the desired effect. Anson instinctively edged back a little as the ball came in, cutting the outside corner where Chuck's glove was held. It went for a called strike.

"You never saw anything faster than that in your time, Goldie," Chuck told him. "Take your three cuts and sit down."

Anson didn't say anything. He tightened his grip on the bat and slammed the next ball down the right field foul line. It curved outside the white stripe. Anson was hitting from the left side of the plate.

Chuck called the next one in low around Anson's knees and close. He remembered that Goldie never had been able to hit that ball in the old days.

Ad nodded and threw. It was higher than Chuck wanted it, but Anson missed by inches, the ball literally darting over the top of the bat for the third strike.

In the stands the crowd had gone wild. They were standing up, howling as Ad walked to the dugout. Harrigan was wiping his face with a towel and shaking his head.

"It wasn't the strikeouts," the Plover manager gulped to Chuck, "it was the way he did it. That ball's a hummer. Gardner."

Chuck blew on his left hand. "Don't tell me, Jack," he grinned.

Ad went out the following inning and walked the first man. After that he set-

tied down to get one out on a roller to first and the other two via the strikeout route. The fast ball was hopping beautifully for the final batsman and the ball nearly got away from Chuck.

"I never seen that stuff before," the umpire mumbled through his mask. "This kid's goin' places, Gardner."

"Right to the top," Chuck said quietly. He knew what was going to happen immediately after this game and he was glad he had that contract with the Prestons. The scouts would swarm like bees when the rumor got around—a kid with a dazzling fast ball and control. Every big league manager in the east was on the lookout for something like that. They came along once in ten years.

Again in the seventh Ad fanned McNair and Anson. This time the first baseman went back to the dugout without a word, and Chuck saw him talking excitedly with McNair near the water cooler. Then Campbell joined them.

Chuck's eyes narrowed. He got Ad in a corner between innings and said softly, "Remember, Ad, I don't want you to sign any kind of papers or make any agreements with anyone."

"What?" Ad asked in surprise. "What papers, Mr. Gardner?"

"Any papers," Chuck said, "that are stuck in front of you."

Ad allowed one hit in the eighth, a clean smack to center field by Tip Jamison, Star center fielder. Ad grooved the ball and Tip's bat met it.

"From now on," Chuck told the kid in the dugout, "we start to work on the corners. Those guys up in the big time will kill anything down the middle—even a rifle bullet. You work it in on the handle or out wide, high or low, and they just tip it. That's what the fielders are for."

"The—the big time?" Ad stammered. "You mean the big leagues?"

"That's right. You'll be eighteen next month, Ad. You're grown up."

"Sure," Ad's eyes widened.

In the ninth Ad fanned two out of three, working the fast ball exclusively. In the stands the Plover fans were raving, and Harrigan said excitedly.

"He gets twenty-five to throw for me next Sunday."

Chuck smiled.

"Thirty-five," Harrigan blurted out. "Forty, kid."

"Be yourself," Chuck told him. "You know this boy doesn't belong here, Jack."

"Forty dollars!" Ad Preston muttered, "for pitching one game." He looked at Chuck strangely.

"We don't want it," Chuck said. "We're leaving for Metropolis City tomorrow, Jack."

"Oh," Harrigan said, crestfallen. "I might have expected it."

Ad didn't seem to understand. "What's up there, Mr. Gardiner?" he wanted to know.

"Metropolis City Buffaloes," Chuck told him. "League ball." He'd played several games for the Buffaloes three years back and he knew the manager, Ike Durkin. The Buffaloes were in the Midwest League and they drew ten and fifteen thousand for their games. A ball player was noticed in the Midwest loop because big league scouts kept a close watch on them.

IV

IN the dressing room Chuck went into the shower room, leaving Ad still sitting on the bench in a daze.

"Metropolis City Buffalos!" the kid was saying to himself.

Chuck came back five minutes later to see young Preston standing with McNair, Campbell and Anson. McNair seemed to be doing the talking.

"Get over there, kid," Harrigan muttered.

Chuck pushed his way in between Campbell and Anson. "What's this?" he asked acidly, "a political convention?"

McNair stared at him. "You own this boy?"

"I hold his contract. Any more questions?" He saw Campbell's big jaw drop and Goldie Anson looked a little sick. In the dugout, Chuck was sure they'd been dividing up the dough they would make on Ad Preston.

"Pretty smart," McNair sneered. "How much you cleanin' up, Gardiner?"

Chuck reddened. "I'm taking this boy to the top," he snapped.

"Not for buttons, you aren't."

"All right," Chuck scowled. "You

boys can take a walk now."

They went away and Ad said, "You know them, Mr. Gardiner?"

"Very well," Chuck said quietly. "That big, light-haired chap led the National league in batting and home runs a good many years ago. You struck him out twice. Keep that in mind, Ad."

"A big leaguer!" Ad gasped.

"You'll see more of them before you die," Chuck told him. "What did they want to know?"

"Asked me how old I was," Ad said, "and whether I was sticking with the Plovers?"

"If anybody comes around again," Chuck said, "tell them to see me." He dressed slowly while Ad went to the shower room.

Jack Harrigan came over and stood against one of the lockers.

"You got something there but he'll take handling, Chuck."

The catcher nodded. Ad was still a kid and he'd never been around. He could easily be upset, and when he was, he forgot where the plate stood.

"Give him the wrong catcher," Harrigan went on, "and he'll blow up like a balloon."

"I can catch him," Chuck said.

"Where he's going?" Harrigan asked softly. "You ain't no spring chicken, Gardner."

Chuck didn't say anything. Preston would be up in the big time—possibly even before the season was over. The kid had control and that was the big factor.

"If I remeber," Harrigan said, "you walked out, Gardner, because they were giving you a dirty deal in the stands."



2—Baseball Stories—Summer

Chuck bent his head to tie his shoelaces. Thirteen years had gone by but he hadn't forgotten that. If he got back they'd still refer to him as 'Leo's boy.'

"I'll worry about it when it happens," Chuck mumbled.

They found Elva waiting outside the dressing room. She didn't say much till they were on the bus, riding home.

"He did well didn't he, Mr. Gardner?" the girl murmured. They sat together with Ad in the rear seat.

"You'll never know how well," Chuck told her. "I'd like to take him up to Metropolis City tomorrow and get him a job with the Buffalos."

Elva looked disappointed. "Didn't they want to keep him in Barnfield?" she asked.

Chuck grinned. "Harrigan offered me forty dollars to let Ad pitch next Sunday afternoon. I turned him down."

"Forty dollars!" the girl gasped, "for three hours work?"

"It's chicken feed," Chuck said.

Elva took a deep breath. "That's what we need, Mr. Gardner," she smiled.

"You'll have more than they can eat before long," the catcher chuckled.

TWO days later he walked into the Buffalo dressing room with Ad Preston at his side. Buffalo players looked at them curiously, and one man said,

"How's it, Gardner?"

Chuck nodded. He went straight for Ike Durkin's office at the far end and caught Durkin just coming out.

"Glad to see you, Chuck," Durkin grinned. "I got your wire this morning."

"Can you use us?" Chuck asked.

Durkin looked at him. "Where's the pitcher?" he wanted to know. "Not this—?"

"That's him," Chuck smiled. "Ad Preston."

Durkin frowned. "I figured he was your kid brother, Chuck," he said. "What's the joke?"

"He struck out Goldie Anson twice in a row," Chuck said, "Goldie is still rubbing his eyes."

"How old is Goldie—seventy-eight?" Durkin mumbled. "Can he see yet?"

"Give the kid a show," Chuck said quietly. "Let him throw to your batters this afternoon. If you don't like him we

go home again."

Durkin shrugged, a little relieved "That's an idea, Chuck," he said. "I can use you for a week if you want."

"I think," the catcher smiled, "you'll be signing both of us up, Ike."

"We'll see," the Buffalo manager said. He got out two Buffalo uniforms for the men and they found empty lockers. Very self-conscious, Ad Preston dressed hurriedly and waited for Chuck to get finished.

Some of the Buffalo players saw him, and Sammy Coy, the shortstop yelled.

"You bringin' your own mascot, Chuck?"

Chuck picked up his mitt and nodded to Ad. "Let's go," he said.

Out on the field they warmed up together near the grandstand. It was one-thirty in the afternoon and only a few people present. Ad stared around at the big stands with a seating capacity of fifteen thousand.

"The ball field is the same," Chuck called softly. "Three bases and a home plate. It's the same distance from the pitcher's box to me."

Ad grinned and he hunched his shoulders. For fifteen minutes he threw easily to Chuck while the Buffalos were taking batting practice. The stands started to fill up.

After that Chuck called a halt and walked to the dugout. "Ready to see the kid, Ike?" he called.

"Sure," Durkin said. "Put him in."

The Buffalo regulars were standing around the cage, waiting their turn at bat when Ad walked out on the mound. Chuck strapped on his things and took over behind the plate.

"What's he got, Gardner?" Coy asked.

"Take a swing and find out," Chuck told him.

Sammy Coy, short, stocky, bow-legged, took three swings, fouled the first pitch, and missed the next two cleanly. He missed two more which zoomed over the top of his bat.

"Kind of fast, Sammy?" Chuck called softly.

Coy smiled wryly. "Let somebody else try it," he said.

Dillon, the Buffalo first baseman, two hundred pounds, hitting from the right side, slashed at several pitches, rolling

one in the dirt, and missing the others cleanly. The ball was smacking into Chuck's big glove, cracking like rifle shots.

"Let's see his hook," Ike Durkin said from behind the cage. The little man's voice was suppressed with excitement.

Ad threw a few, and then Durkin wanted the fast one again. Dillon swung—late, and fanned.

"That's enough," Durkin murmured. "Cool him off, Chuck."

They went back to the dugout. The few fans in the grandstand had watched the spectacle of the big guns swinging and missing. They gave Ad a hand and the boy's face reddened.

"Never heard that before," Durkin said, "for a warm-up pitcher." He paused. "Take him out in the pen, Chuck. I think we might use him this afternoon."

"Sure," Chuck said. The Buffalos had the second place Trojans on deck.

IN the seventh inning with the score tied at two all, Jay Phillips, Buffalo pitcher, started to waver. Chuck, sitting in the bullpen bench in left field, stood up and waved to Ad.

Two hits rang from Trojan bats, and then another. Ad had been throwing alternately most of the afternoon and his arm was loose.

"Don't groove it for these guys," Chuck said. "They're tougher than the Stars. You watch my glove, Ad."

"Okay," Ad murmured.

Durkin gave them the sign a moment later and they started toward the infield. The Buffalo infielders turned to watch them as they came in. Sammy Coy said,

"Feed 'em that fast one, kid. Make 'em like it."

Ad smiled and Chuck winked gravely at Coy. That was the kind of thing to put young Preston's feet firmly on the ground.

"I'd better handle him," Chuck said to Durkin.

"Sure," the manager nodded.

Chuck heard the hum in the stands. Those who had been present earlier in the afternoon were telling others of the kid who had stood the Buffalo batsmen on their respective ears in batting practice.

Baldwin, Trojan shortstop, was the first man to face the new thrower. The Trojans

had men on first and third, with one already in, and one down.

Ad grooved the first pitch for Baldwin when Chuck called for it on the inside. Baldwin's yellow bat flashed and the ball shot from it with terrific speed.

Sammy Coy moved with the crack of the ball. He stuck up his gloved hand and the ball spat into it. Coy threw to third, nearly catching the runner off the sack.

Ad Preston was slightly shaken. He fidgeted out on the mound until the Buffalos started to talk it up. Kennedy, Trojan left fielder, went down swinging at three fast ones.

In the eighth Ad struck out two out of three batsmen, and in the ninth he got the side with one strikeout and two rollers to the infield. Not a man had hit the ball solidly since that first pitch.

Chuck doubled one runner home the last half of the ninth, and came in with the winning run on a single by Dillon.

"Bring him in the office," Durkin said in the dressing room.

With their uniforms still on, Chuck and Ad followed the little man. Durkin got out contracts from a battered oak desk.

"How about two-fifty a month?" Durkin said to Chuck.

"For me it'll do," Chuck said. "This boy's worth more."

"Three hundred," Durkin said.

"Talk money," Chuck grinned. He saw Ad holding on to the back of a chair.

"Three fifty," Durkin growled, "and I can't go any higher."

"It'll do," Chuck said. He signed the contract and then signed under Ad Preston's name also. "This boy won't be here very long anyway, Ike."

"I know it," Durkin said. "He'll be with the Grays as soon as Partridge hears about him."

"The Grays?" Chuck mumbled.

"Sure," Durkin said. "We've been a Gray farm club all this season. They bought us over last winter."

Chuck nodded dumbly. He walked out with Ad Preston.

"Don't you like the Grays?" Ad asked. "They're in second place now, Mr. Gardner."

"I played with them," Chuck said quietly,

"years ago. You'll hear about it before long."

"You played with the Grays?" the boy blinked. "Big league?"

"Big league," Chuck smiled grimly.

AD PRESTON won four games in a row during the month of July, and finished out three others in relief roles. He had six straight wins and a save when Tom Craddock, Gray scout, came to Metropolitan City.

"Long time, no see, Chuck," Craddock said.

"How's it, Tom?" Chuck asked. "Still looking for ivory?"

"You got a piece down here," Craddock murmured, "so Ike tells us. Where'd you find him, Chuck?"

Briefly, the catcher explained the situation. "He's faster now than Campbell was."

"I'll see him," Craddock smiled.

That afternoon Ad Preston fanned thirteen Beavers and hurled a three-hit shut-out win for the Buffalos. His control was still beautiful and he was hitting the corners nicely, seldom grooving a ball. Chuck had worked with him daily, smoothing out his delivery, getting that curve ball to break, teaching the boy a change of pace. In a month Ad Preston had acquired considerable polish and poise on the mound.

"I don't believe it," Tom Craddock muttered. "A kid like this will mean a pennant for Jeff Partridge if he holds up." The big man paused. "Ike tells me you've been catching all his games, Chuck, and that the kid would probably blow up with another catcher. That mean you go along with him?"

Chuck Gardner took a deep breath. "I go along with him," he said slowly.

"You want to?" Craddock asked.

"No," Chuck said, "I don't want to, but I'm going."

"Don't worry about it," Craddock smiled. "They forgot about you, kid. It's thirteen years."

"Nobody has a better memory than a baseball fan," Chuck murmured. "Don't kid me, Tom." He wondered how Ad Preston was going to take it when he got the facts of that Series scandal in '32. Ad looked up to him, almost worshipped him.

That night Elva came up on the Barnfield bus to spend the week-end with her brother. Out of Ad's salary they had hired a man to take care of the chickens, and Ad was talking of incubators, and attending an agricultural college during the winter. The boy was in the seventh heaven.

They ate in a restaurant in town and Elva seemed rather quiet. Chuck had grown to like this girl and he'd seen a lot of her as she came up every week-end to see Ad. Tonight she had something on her mind but she didn't want to say it in front of Ad.

"A little surprise," Chuck said when they were eating their dessert. He said it as though it meant nothing. "We're leaving for New York on Monday, Ad. The Grays want to have a look at you."

Ad choked on a mouthful of food. Then he took a deep breath when he'd recovered himself.

"A Gray scout was in the stands today," Chuck explained. "I spoke with him after the game. You're going up and I'm going with you."

"Boy!" Ad said.

"Take a walk around the block," Chuck advised. "Think it over, Ad." When Ad ducked out, Chuck said, "What's the trouble, Elva?"

The girl shook her head. "I'm not sure as yet," she said, "but I think mother has gotten us into some trouble."

"Your mother?" Chuck grinned. "In what way?"

"The same day you left for Metropolis City," Elva said. "Three men stopped at the farm. I was in Barnfield at the time and didn't meet them."

"What did they want?" Chuck asked curiously.

"Mother didn't tell me about this till yesterday," Elva said. "She wanted to keep it a surprise. These men offered her five thousand dollars if she would sign a paper letting them sell Ad's contract to a big league team. They said they were friends of yours and that you'd be agreeably surprised."

Chuck Gardner's jaw tightened. "You get their names?" he asked grimly.

"One man called himself Mr. McNair," Elva said. "Mother didn't seem to under-

stand much about it and she thought five thousand dollars was a tremendous sum. When they said you would be pleased to hear about it, she thought it was all right."

"Did the check come?" Chuck asked.

"They mailed her the check yesterday," Elva explained, "and that was when mother told me about it." She stopped and looked at his face. "Did you know these men?"

"I know them," Chuck scowled. "They're crooks and they want to hold Ad and sell his contract to a big league team for a price that'll make the five thousand they spent look like a dollar and half."

"It seems like a lot of money," Elva murmured.

"Detroit paid Dick Wakefield over fifty thousand dollars bonus to sign a contract," Chuck murmured, "and a pitcher who can win twenty-five games a year or more for a long stretch is worth more than that. I wouldn't be surprised to see McNair try to get a big league bid up to seventy thousand for the boy's contract."

"Seventy thousand dollars!" Elva blinked, "to have Ad play on their team?"

"It's a funny world," Chuck tried to smile, "but Ad is worth that much. I know." He said, "You know anything about the contract your mother signed?"

"She said there was a clause in it that Mr. McNair would keep whatever price he received for getting Ad into the big leagues, but that he would make sure Ad got a contract calling for at least eight thousand dollars a year."

Chuck Gardner shook his head. "Of course your mother wouldn't know how much McNair would receive for doing that little business, and I guess the five thousand cash and the eight thousand a year looked like big money."

"What shall we do?" Elva asked.

"Tell her not to cash that check," Chuck said. "I'll have a talk with the Gray attorneys when we reach New York. I think they'll be able to straighten things out before McNair and his friends can do any damage."

"I'd like to go along," Elva told him, "if you don't mind, Mr. Gardner."

"I don't mind," Chuck smiled. "It'll be nice having you." He looked up Tom Craddock that night, but learned that the scout had already taken a night plane east.

V

FIVE days later Chuck with Ad and Elva Preston got off the train at the Penn Station. After setting up the brother and sister in a hotel, he took the subway over the Gray offices. It had been a long time since he'd gone into that building.

The waiting room was small but a half dozen men were sitting in it, newspaper written all over them. Chuck's jaw dropped. These birds only congregated when something was brewing.

"Hello, Gardner," a man called from a corner.

Chuck recognized Ben Harrington of the "Globe." He nodded quietly and he saw the others stare at him strangely.

"Anything to say about the kid?" Harrington asked.

"Not yet," Chuck murmured. He was surprised to know that the sporting men had already found out about young Preston. Craddock must have done a lot of talking when he hit New York.

Chuck gave his name at the desk and was called in immediately. He remembered this big spacious room and the mahogany desk behind which sat the slender, immaculate Steve Baldwin, Gray owner. Baldwin was in his forties but he looked younger. He'd been quite a sport in Chuck's day, after inheriting the club from his father. Steve's grayish-black hair was parted in the middle, and he had a pair of mild blue eyes which were sparkling now in anger.

Jeff Partridge and Tom Craddock were there, and three other men—the Big Three of bygone days.

"How's it, Gardner?" McNair grinned.

Partridge and Craddock weren't smiling either. Jeff shook hands with Chuck and said that he was glad to see him.

"What's the story on this, Chuck," Tom Craddock asked abruptly. "You told me you were handling Preston's affairs."

"That's right," Chuck said.

"You mean you were," McNair smiled. "Take a walk, kid."

Anson and Campbell were across the room.

"What happened?" Chuck asked grimly.

Jeff Partridge explained. He sat in a chair near Steve Baldwin.

"McNair claims they have a contract

signed by Preston's mother even before the boy started to play with the Buffalos. They got out a court order forbidding Preston to play with the Grays. Now they want to sell him to us."

"For fifty grand," Tom Craddock growled.

"The Cougars made an offer of forty-five," McNair smiled. "They had a scout out in the Midwest League, Tom. Is the kid worth it?"

"What do you know, Chuck?" Partridge asked.

"Get these monkeys out," Chuck said flatly.

McNair laughed coldly. "Don't play the big-shot, kid," he said. "Ad Preston's a

THEY NEVER CHANGE

Cincinnati Red Stockings of 1868-70 had a streak of 92 consecutive wins which was finally broken by the Atlantics of Brooklyn in an 11-inning game. In the last half of the eleventh, with the score 7-5 in favor of the Red Stockings, the Atlantics got two men on bases and the next batter singled. When McVey, Cincinnati outfielder, stooped to field the ball, several spectators jumped on his back permitting the two base runners to score and the batter to go around to third from where, a moment later, he scored the winning run. Newspapermen present were outraged, but the game went into the books.

minor and his mother handles his business. She's got our check and we got the contract to sell him to a big league club. You don't believe it, see my attorney."

"I'll talk," Chuck said to Partridge, "when they're gone."

"All right," Baldwin put in, "you men may leave now. You'll hear from us in the morning."

"Don't wait too long," McNair snapped. "If we sell this kid to the Cougars it means the pennant. Ask Craddock."

Chuck waited till the three men had left, then he produced the contract he'd drawn up in the Preston living room the first day he'd met young Ad.

Steve Baldwin stared at it and then pressed a buzzer. He pushed the paper toward Partridge. The manager read it and smiled at Chuck.

"That's dated nearly a week earlier than McNair's contract," he said. "What happened out there, Chuck?"

Briefly, Chuck told them the story of his finding Ad Preston on the high school field, and the insistence of the sister that they draw up a contract.

"That saves our neck," Tom Craddock breathed.

"We shouldn't have any trouble breaking down McNair's plan," Baldwin grinned. "They're probably not even aware of this earlier contract, and our attorney can prove that they misrepresented the facts when they went to Mrs. Preston."

"You guaranteed that kid twenty-five a week," Jeff Partridge muttered, "and there's nothing here guaranteeing you anything. You don't stand to make a cent on this deal, Chuck."

"If you want to give that boy a bonus for signing," Chuck said quietly. "I can tell you the money won't be wasted."

"We'll take care of Preston," Baldwin said. He held out his hand. "Glad to have you back, Gardner."

When Chuck was going out, Craddock muttered,

"That guy could have made a small fortune with that kid, just by taking a regular commission!"

The sports writers were gone when Chuck passed through the waiting room. He took a cab over to the hotel and found two men in the Prestons' room, pumping them. Ad looked a little bewildered and Elva was sitting in a chair across from Ad, mouth tight.

"You boys can leave now," Chuck said. He recognized the two as writers he'd seen in the Gray office. Someway they'd located the Prestons and had come running for a story.

"Nothing to say, Gardner?" one of them asked.

"No story," Chuck told him.

The other chap, a young fellow, thin-shouldered, bespectacled, said softly.

"Leo Roth in on this, Gardner?"

Chuck grabbed the man by the coat and hurled him against the wall.

"You rat!" he snarled. His face was white.

The writers left hurriedly and Chuck went into the other room, still trembling a little. Elva followed him.

"I'm sorry," Chuck said miserably. "I forgot myself." He added, "You'll be reading quite a lot about me in the morn-

ing papers. You can believe it or not."

"Is it true?" the girl asked softly.

"No," Chuck grated. "None of it."

"Then I won't believe it," Elva Preston told him.

THE write-ups in the morning papers were worse than he had imagined. They'd dug up the old story, giving it in detail. There were pictures of the Big Three and of Chuck Gardner when he'd been the Pepperpot. There was a picture of Leo Roth and another one of Ad Preston.

The same cloud hung over Chuck Gardner, and this time he was involved in a bitter battle to retain his rights to a rising young hurler. The sports writers mentioned the Big Three and Chuck Gardner, this time opposed to each other, threatening a long court fight over Preston. Ad had already been forbidden to pitch for the Grays because of the court order.

One columnist stated emphatically that it was a black spot on the good name of baseball when four men such as these could get such a hold on a decent kid like Preston.

Skip McNair had intimated that he would go to court and fight for ten years if necessary, but Ad Preston would never pitch for the Grays while he retained the contract.

Jeff Partridge called up the first thing in the morning before Chuck had seen the Prestons.

"Don't mind that stuff," the Gray manager said. "We're giving you a clean bill of fare in tonight's papers. The boys didn't have any of the facts last night when they went to press."

"It's all right," Chuck said dully.

"Our attorney is getting that court order lifted," Partridge went on, "so bring Preston down to the field this afternoon. If he's fresh we might try him out."

"He's fresh," Chuck muttered.

"McNair hasn't got a leg to stand on," Partridge explained. "Our attorney thinks they'll drop the case immediately when they learn about the prior contract you have."

"Okay," Chuck said wearily. "We'll be at the field, Jeff." He went to the Prestons' room. Young Ad had just finished reading the morning paper and he was stunned.

He looked at Chuck, but didn't say anything.

"That court order is being lifted," Chuck murmured. "You might work today, Ad." He was a little sick himself at what he saw in Ad Preston's eyes. This boy had placed him on a pedestal and they'd torn down the statue overnight.

"All right, Mr. Gardner," Ad said.

Chuck didn't see Elva that morning, and in the afternoon he rode up to Gray Field in a cab with Ad. Elva had gone shopping in the morning and had promised to be at the field in the afternoon.

"How's the arm?" Chuck asked once.

"All right," Ad said.

Chuck left him alone. A boy had to work out something like this by himself. None of the sports writers had actually stated Chuck had accepted money for throwing big Series games, but the implication was there. If Ad wanted to believe them there was nothing could be done about it. Leo Roth had died a half dozen years ago, and he had been the only one who could clear up the matter. If he'd lived, Chuck was doubtful whether anyone would take a man like Roth's statements seriously.

In the Gray dressing room Chuck saw few faces that he remembered. Stud McKee, the second baseman, was still around, and he grinned at the catcher, then come over to shake hands.

"How's that kid?" McKee wanted to know. "They've been tellin' tall stories, Chuck?"

"You'll see him yourself," Chuck said. For the first time he was beginning to wonder how this would affect young Preston. The boy was admittedly high-strung and the least little thing could throw him out of gear. Chuck remembered that first game with the Plovers when he'd threatened to go sky-high.

Fifteen minutes later Chuck Gardner came out through the dressing room door. It was the same field, sun glaring down over the rim of the huge grandstand, the diamond hard and fast, long stretches of neatly-mown grass running out to the billboards around the outfield.

This was a Saturday afternoon with the stands filling up rapidly, and the tough Cougars, in faded gray uniforms, coming out of the dugout across the field.

Chuck slapped his mitt, tugged at his cap, and walked out into the sunshine with Ad Preston. He was prepared for what happened, but it didn't make it any easier.

They spotted him immediately, and a chorus of boos greeted him. A pop bottle sailed down from the upper tier and fell a few yards away from him. Calmly, Chuck walked over, picked it up and tossed it toward the dugout.

"Let's go, Ad," he told the boy.

Ad looked sick. He walked away the required distance and began to throw. A couple of photographers rushed over and took shots of him.

Jeff Partridge walked over to Chuck and said, "I could try Lefty Shane, but I'd like to see this boy work. All right?"

"Okay," Chuck muttered. They were making remarks in the stands now. He caught the words, 'cheap chiseler.' Then he spotted Elva Preston sitting in a box behind the Gray dugout. She waved a gloved hand to him and smiled.

A fan with a booming voice howled, "You should give that guy a striped suit, Partridge!"

Ad threw a fast ball and it nearly got away from the catcher. Chuck had to dive to knock it down. He didn't say anything to the kid, but Jeff Partridge, watching from the dugout, looked worried.

WHEN the announcement came through that Gardner was catching, a half dozen more pop bottles fell from the stands, close enough to be uncomfortable.

Chuck glanced toward the Cougar dugout as he squatted behind the plate. The tough, brown-faced men were sitting on the steps watching Ad as the boy picked up the new ball.

Watching him, Chuck Gardner knew what was coming. The kid was on edge today; he had too much on his mind to throw balls past this Cougar outfit.

Out on the field the Grays began to talk it up. Partridge sat in the dugout with Craddock. Thirty thousand odd fans were waiting.

Dink Meade, leading off for the Cougars, slapped Preston's first pitch into left field for a single. The ball had been fair and down the middle.



Chuck squatted down again as George Prescott, Cougar shortstop, came into the rectangle, hitting from the left side. Prescott faked at one ball and then dumped a neat bunt along the first base line.

Ad raced in for it, picked it up and dropped it. He then threw six feet over first base and the runners went to second and third.

"Easy does it," Chuck called. They were in a spot and he knew it. These Cougars had a habit of keeping after a pitcher once they got him going, and they were talking in the dugout, shouting to Ad, which didn't make matters any better.

Ad walked Sanborn on four balls, none of them coming near the plate. Chuck had to dive after the last one to prevent the run from scoring. He walked out to the mound and the crowd yelled,

"Get back, you bum!"

Ad was as white as a sheet. Chuck noticed that the bull pen pitcher was on his feet, throwing.

"We came a long way, Ad," Chuck said slowly. "We don't want to go back now. Think about that mattress, kid. Throw it into my glove."

Ad shook his head but didn't say anything. Chuck walked back woodenly. He'd seen other kids, with tremendous talent, who'd gone down after one disastrous whipping. They'd never gotten over it. Being driven from the mound the

initial start was one way of breaking a kid pitcher's heart.

Chuck called for the fast one on Jake Rolland, Cougar right fielder. Rolland was a stocky man, hitting from the right side, holding his bat long. Chuck asked for it close because a man didn't usually hit a close one very far.

Ad put it down the middle, and Rolland's yellow bat flashed. Chuck took off the mask and watched the ball drop over the left-center field wall.

Partridge came out of the dugout and stared at Chuck. The catcher walked over to him.

"He's fast," the Gray manager said, "but what good is it?"

"The kid's not settled," Chuck muttered. "He's grooving every pitch."

"Okay," Partridge said resignedly. "The bags are cleared anyway." He went back to the dugout and Chuck walked to the mound again.

"Look, Ad," he said quietly, "you've been reading a lot of things in the paper. Have I ever played crooked with you?"

"No," the boy said miserably.

"I never took a dirty dollar in my life," Chuck Gardner said. "You can believe that or not, kid." He went back to the box.

McClellan, two hundred pounds, very fast, with Indian blood in him, singled to center. Albright, the Cougar second sacker singled to right, McClellan going to third, McVeigh hit to short and the ball was whipped to the plate.

McClellan hammered down the path like a mad bull, but Chuck held his ground, taking the throw. He laid the ball on the Indian, but McClellan went right over him, knocking him to the ground.

Twisting as they fell, McClellan's spike dug into Chuck's right ankle behind the knee pads. He felt the sharp pain and it made him sick. Blood started to soak the black sock. It made his shoe soggy after a while.

Ad came in as Chuck was climbing to his feet. McClellan was out.

"Okay," Chuck grinned. "Let's get 'em, kid." He walked gingerly on that right foot, but he slapped his glove confidently.

Ad went back to the mound and threw

a hook to Chad Pollock. The ball went down to McKee at second, and Stud pulled a fast double-play—second to first, resting the side.

Chuck walked to the dugout and sat down. Ad Preston put on his jacket and took a drink of water at the fountain. He looked at Chuck, but didn't say anything.

Partridge took a deep breath, shook his head, and walked out to the third base coaching line. The Grays scored two runs in the first, making it 4 to 2 for the Cougars.

Chuck felt the ankle stiffening when he got up to go out again. He walked without a limp, ignoring the shooting pains.

Ad passed the first two Cougar batsmen, trying hard. The fast ball was very fast, but the kid's control was poor. He got Prescott on a pop to first base, and then Sanborn, the third baseman topped the ball, knocking into the dirt toward third base. The hit was a fluke, but all men were safe.

Jake Rolland was coming up again, grinning a little, swinging that yellow stick. Chuck saw Ad's face out on the mound. The kid was still scared. He hadn't found himself.

The first pitch was shoulder high and Rolland cut hard. Chuck Gardner threw off his mask and raced for the boxes near the Gray dugout. The ball had gone straight up into the air, spinning toward the stands.

Jeff Partridge yelled, "No—no!"

Chuck kept going as the ball dropped. He felt his hip skid the edge of the dugout and then he lunged forward, reaching with his glove. His legs and stomach hit the iron railing as the white ball fell into the glove. He got his free hand over the ball, holding it tightly as he tumbled in among the spectators.

Sick from the pain in his legs, he scrambled to his feet, seeing Jack Reagan, Gray first baseman, running in to cover home. The Cougar on third stayed where he was.

There wasn't much noise in the stands as Chuck climbed over the railing and walked grimly to the plate. He caught a glimpse of Elva Preston in the box.

Ad was biting his lips out on the mound. He threw a hook which broke fairly well,

and McClellan rolled to third for the final out.

Chuck walked to the dugout and unstrapped the knee pads. His legs were getting black and blue from that smash against the iron railing, and he knew that by tomorrow he wouldn't be able to walk very well.

The Grays started another rally, the first two batsmen landing on the sacks with clean base hits. Tug Oakley, Gray outfielder, stepped into the rectangle, and then Chuck picked his stick from the rack and went out to the circle.

When Oakley went down swinging, Chuck went up to the rubber, throwing away an excess bat. There wasn't much noise from the stands, but they were watching him. Chuck Gardner smiled coldly. The fans found it a little difficult booing a guy who was taking it.

CAREFULLY, Chuck picked out his ball, a fast one on the outside and hit it to right, scoring both runners and tying the game. They made a play for home, trying to catch the Gray runner going in, and Chuck headed for second. He ran on legs that were getting wobbly, but he put everything into it, going into the bag in a flying dive when the ball was shot down that way.

Something exploded against the side of his head as his fingers touched the sack. There was a terrific roaring sound and lights flashing in front of his eyes. He could hear voices and felt hands lifting him up.

When he opened his eyes he was sitting in the dugout and the club trainer, Marty Doyle, was bathing his face with a wet towel. Doyle was a small, wiry man with Irish blue eyes peering out behind spectacles.

"That's enough for you, Chuck," Doyle growled. "You're through."

Chuck tried to sit up straight. He knew now what had happened out there at second. The ball from the catcher had smacked him squarely in the side of the head. He could still feel it throbbing. He was out of the game.

"You took enough for three guys today," Doyle snapped. "Now sit still." The trainer had been with the club eighteen years.

Chuck didn't say anything. The kid was sitting next to him, eyes worried. He had to go out next inning by himself with Ed Randall, doing the receiving.

"I never saw a guy could take a licking like you," Doyle said, "and I'm still wondering why you wouldn't let me look you over during that big Series. What did you have, a couple of broken legs?"

"Cut it out," Chuck muttered. He saw Ad looking at him strangely.

"You're a guy won't crawl," Doyle snapped, "and you won't quit." When he walked away to the water cooler, Ad Preston said softly.

"What did you have in that series, Mr. Gardner?"

"Forget about it," Chuck growled. "I felt good." Ad Preston was smiling now.

"All right, Mr. Gardner," the kid said. "All right."

When Ad walked out of the dugout to start the third, Chuck called after him.

"Hit the corners, kid."

Ad nodded. He turned and grinned. When he started to warm up with Ed Randall, he looked more like a pitcher. One ball nearly got away from Randall, and the catcher blinked.

The Cougars had Albright, leading off, anxious to hit. Ad Preston wound up and threw. The ball clipped the outside corner for a called strike. When Albright came in a little closer, Ad sent another fast on the inside. Albright cut at this, swinging a trifle slow. It was another strike.

Chuck Gardner heard the murmur in the stands. Jeff Partridge said softly,

"That kid is fast, Chuck."

"Wait," Chuck smiled, "till he gets warmed up."

Albright swung at the third strike, missing it cleanly. It was the fast one, rising as it crossed the plate, hitting Randall's glove with a smack.

Ad tugged at his cap and stepped off the mound. He grinned toward the dugout and then went to work on Pollock. Randall caught one ball and then ran toward the dugout for a different sponge for his glove.

"Wow!" the regular catcher grinned.

Pollock went down swinging a moment later, slashing at a baffling hook which

broke down and away. The crowd began to talk now as Ad warmed to his task. The boy seemed to be getting faster with each throw.

Chuck sat back against the dugout wall and relaxed. The kid was over the bar now, and the rest was coasting. He fanned Rockett, Cougar first baseman, on three pitched balls, the last one with Rockett's bat on his shoulders, eyes wide.

Chuck listened to the noise as young Preston walked to the bench. Jeff Partridge was grinning broadly. He looked at Chuck and said, "Thanks, kid."

Doyle came back again and stated, "We're taking a walk to the club house now, Chuck. I want to look over those legs. You can watch the boy from the window if you wish."

Chuck Gardner stood up, wincing a little. He slapped Ad Preston's shoulder as he went up the steps, leaning a little on Doyle as he walked. As he came out into the open the noise stopped in the stands. He walked along the edge of the grandstand with Marty Doyle, and then he heard steps behind him.

Ad came up. The kid didn't say anything. He just gulped a few times and grasped Chuck's hand. Then he was running toward the dugout again, but the crowd had witnessed that little act.

They were silent as Chuck walked past third base and down along the line toward the dressing room in center field. Elva Preston had been standing up in the box as Chuck went past her, and she'd started to clap, her face grim. She was clapping alone in the beginning, but a few others in the vicinity took it up. It began to spread little by little.

By the time Chuck reached the steps of the dressing room in deep center, the thirty thousand were applauding. They were standing up. There was no shouting, just this clapping, steady, very queer.

Chuck turned around, a mist in his eyes. "What the hell," he muttered weakly.

"That's for a game guy," Doyle said quietly, "and a decent one."

"Hell," Chuck said again, but he was smiling through the tears as he went through the door.

Pawley sighed. "I know how your mind works, youngster. Just like me when I was your age."



Rollickin' Rookie

By Richard Brister

Manager Dan Pawley's fiery tirades against erring players were legend throughout the circuit. And young Tobin, it seems, was aiming to knock the wind out of his sails.

MORRY SUSSMAN, the Blues' right fielder, was up. Bob Tobin drifted over toward second. Sussman had a habit of threading line drives neatly between first and second. And this, Bob thought grimly, was no day to be caught asleep at the switch.

He cupped his hands and yelled to the mound: "Let 'im hit one, Harry. We're ready for him."

Harry Burrell stared at Bob with sober, unblinking eyes. A quiet guy, a family man, well into his thirties, he seemed now to have serious doubts about Bob's encouraging statement. Bob's forehead crinkled under the lanky left-hander's doubtful eyes. Bob had been up past midnight, brightening up some dark corners with Frank Coombes, the third baseman, and Danny Kelly. Those two were the Bisons' most aggressive and consistent night-time cutups, but they were fast teaching Bob

all they knew about getting in trouble.

Today Bob's head buzzed like a super-charged beehive, he was bleeding slowly from the eyes, and far from being ready for Sussman, as he'd just assured Harry, he was better prepared to portray the walking dead in a horror picture.

On the mound, Harry went into his deliberate windup. Bob joggled a bit on the balls of his leaden feet, and risked a flicking glance toward the Bison dugout. Manager Dan Pawley sat there like an angry Sphinx, glaring at him with stony disapproval. Dan was a tough old devil, a rigid disciplinarian, and his bleak brown eyes glared at Bob, as if saying:

"Hot stuff out there, ain't you, Tobin? But by God, you better not muff one out there. You can't bust trainin' for long, an' still play heads up baseball."

Involuntarily, Bob shuddered a bit, though the day was warm. He watched

Harry Burrell lean into his swift. The ball went down toward the plate on a line, grooved for Sussman.

There was the staccato *crack* of a squarely met ball. Bob saw a low bullet zooming his way, a bit to his left. His heart jumped with the realization that Sussman had fooled him. The ball was hugging the first base line. Bob scrambled over toward the bag, flinging his gloved hand out toward it. He was too late.

There was a dismal groan from the bleachers. That quiet infield was exploding with action. Rudy Knapp romped in from where he had been perching on third. Vern Grant, the Blues' second sacker, rounded third, was waved on, and lit out for home.

Bob turned to watch Hen Obermyer out in short right field. Hen uncorked a beautiful peg toward the platter. Grant and the ball came in together. Grant slid the last five yards, effectively bowling over Chuck Waldron. When the dust cleared, the ump called Vern safe.

Sussman wound up on second. Harry Burrell stopped them cold after that. But it was 5-4, Blues' favor now. And Bob's error provided flinty Dan Pawley with the conversational fodder for which he'd been waiting.

Frank Coombes joined Bob on the trek to the dugout. "Hold your hat, Bobbo. Dan's fixin' to blast you, looks like. Don't say nothin' to 'im. Mebbe he'll wear 'imself out."

BOB smiled at the slight, red-faced third sacker. "Thanks." It was the best advice, he supposed. Dan Pawley's fiery tirades at erring players were a legend throughout the league. He was a tough, high-handed old devil, Bob knew. Pawley had had one of the strangest careers ever known in baseball. Twenty years ago, he'd been mixed up in some crooked business with a half dozen other players. They'd all been convicted of conspiring to lose a certain game in a series. There had been smart gambling money behind the dirty business, of course. The commissioner had blown his top, banned all seven men from the pro game for life.

The experience had changed young Dan from a happy-go-lucky youngster to a flint-

hearted scourge with the ugliest disposition in baseball. Because Dan had returned to the game. Five years after the incident, he'd finally managed to prove that he'd had no part in the rotten business. He had, in fact, done his darndest to prevent his teammates from pulling off anything crooked, had made such a pest of himself that they'd framed him up the river out of simple orneriness and impatience with him.

Baseball owed Dan an apology. Those in the game bent themselves in half trying to make up for the terrible injustice that had been done him. Dan came back to his old team, the Bisons, as a scrappy first baseman. In two years, the exonerated hero had copped the manager's job. Folks thought then that baseball's debt to Dan Pawley was paid.

But a manager's job couldn't erase the stony scowl that had grown on Dan's face during five long years he'd spent as a pariah of baseball. It couldn't bring back his wife, who had divorced him when he was down and out, taking Dan's small son with her. Dan's wife had died later, and some said he even blamed baseball for that far-fetched as it sounded. Certainly those five ugly years had scarred him deeply. Dan wasn't forgetting.

Nor, Bob thought sourly, as he moved toward the dugout, were any of the men under Dan's wing forgetting. Dan shoved them around with an iron fist, like human checkers. He had the whole team cowed. Bob, in the week since he'd come up to the Bisons from AA ball, had seen men cringe like dogs when Dan Pawley glared at them.

The devil with him, Bob thought. I'm not bluffing for him that easy. What if I did spread myself out a little last night? When you're young—only nineteen—you can lose some sleep and still play good baseball.

He walked into the dugout, telling himself that, trying hard to convince himself of the logic of it. He could feel the expectant silence down there. They were all looking curiously from him to Dan, waiting for the blast that was surely coming, wondering how Bob was going to take it.

Bob stuck his chin out and pulled back his shoulders. The blast didn't come. Dan was waiting, trying to unnerve him. Bob thought: Okay, but I don't buffalo that

easy, wise guy. What's to keep *me* from speaking up first?

Truculently, he said, "I've got a strange feelin' you're fixing to say something, Dan. What's holding your tongue?"

He let his eyes come up, looked insolently, blandly into the older man's cold brown eyes. He did not let his own eyes waver under Dan's famous glare, and he thought: "You don't scare me, Dan Pawley. I'm not one of your soft-bellied meatballs."

An amazing thing happened. Instead of the expected tirade, Dan said in a very quiet voice that was not at all like him. "You jump to conclusions, son. I've got nothing to say to you now. When I do, you'll know it." He nodded toward the men on the bench. "Let's go. Kelly, Hibbard. Just get on. We can still win this ball game. All we need is two runs, this last innin'."

Danny Kelly was on his way out to the platter, swinging three bats. He dropped two, staring back at Dan as if he was seeing a ghost or something. There was a plainly audible sigh of relief along the whole bench. They couldn't figure Dan's uncharacteristically gentle reaction toward Bob's smart-Alecky crack. But their relief was a tangible thing. Could it be that unruly Dan was finally learning to control that hot temper?

Bob relaxed, grinning. He was a little self-conscious though. He had stood up to Dan Pawley and come off unscathed, and he was the man of the hour. He watched Danny Kelly. The big sandy-haired Irishman took an aggressive stance and flourished his bat.

He knocked the first pitch neatly over second for a clean single. The bleachers started a hopeful chant. Bob's heart pounded. Maybe they'd get those two they needed, here in the final half of the ninth. Maybe his error wouldn't have to cost them this ball game.

Paul Hibbard went out, swung mightily three times, and came gloomily back to the dugout. Kelly was now perched on second base. Jack Schiff, the center fielder, did little better. He poled a long high fly out to right field.

Kelly went down to third, but there was a groan in the dugout. Two down, tying run on third. Bob was up, and if he failed

to at least drive Dan Kelly home, it was the Blues' ball game.

Bob was prepared for a sarcastic remark from Dan Pawley. The manager didn't even look at him. He went out there, frowning. Dan was getting some sense. Bob did best when folks let him alone. At nineteen, a cocky adventurous youngster, he preferred to live his life to the hilt, making up rules of his own as he went along. He did not welcome criticism.

He stood easily at the plate, inwardly pleased at the "hands-off" policy Dan Pawley was adopting toward him. He couldn't begin to guess at any sensible motive behind Dan's special treatment of him, but this was no time to worry about it.

He held the bat quite still as the first pitch sailed past him. A called ball. He watched another go past. Then came a called strike. The next pitch was a fast ball down at hip level, where Bob really liked 'em. He stepped in, swinging free and easy, put loose wrist action into the motion.

It felt nice and solid. Before he had taken more than three steps down the line, the high-pitched screams from the bleachers told him his instinct had been well-founded. He turned, eyed the ball as it sailed in a high hard arc, straight into the center field stands.

IT was fun, loping around the bases with a sardonic grin for each disgruntled Blues sackman. He came to the plate with the heady wine of the crowd's delight making his ears hum with pleasure. Danny Kelly was waiting with a hearty handshake for him. So was Frank Coombes. So last night's trio of barroom ball players were a trio again.

Bob felt let down. You'd expect more of the team there to congratulate him. After all, his poke had won the game for them. Well, why worry about it? Frank was saying, "Nice poke," and Danny added, "Lucky for Dan he didn't try to lambast you, for makin' that bobble. He'd be eatin' his words now, Bobbo."

Bob grinned happily as they loped toward the showers. He had at least two good friends on the Bisons. He'd win the others around later. The gang seemed a bit frigid toward him now—apparently they frowned on his nightly highjinks with

Danny and Frank Coombes—but they'd be for him if he kept on lacing into the apple.

Danny Kelly was saying admiringly, "You sure pulled a swiftie on Dan, there in the dugout. Dan must be losin' his grip. I've seen him cuss men out till they broke down an' bawled, for less'n you said to him, Bobbo. Remember Art Shafely, Frank? Dan made a nervous wreck out of Art, ran 'im right out of baseball."

Bob said, shrugging, "Sounds like a build-up. Dan don't seem so wild to me."

"No?" Coombes retorted. "You haven't seen him go on a rampage." He was wagging his head. "You don't know how close you came to bein' cut to pieces. Listen," he went on craftily, "you sure you haven't got somethin' on him? You got away with plain murder, boy."

Bob laughed. "The old bag of wind doesn't scare me. Listen, where'll we go tonight? My head's beginning to shake loose from the cobwebs. It don't feel natural."

The two older men laughed. They were Bob's type, fond of laughs, excitement. His young enthusiasm pleased them. Danny Kelly gave him a hearty slap on the back. "Just stick with me and Frank, kiddo. We'll stir somethin' up, somewhere."

They were just going into the locker-room door as he said it. The rest of the team greeted Kelly's remark in frosty silence. Over near the tall green lockers, Dan Pawley glared at Kelly, then spoke to Bob.

"Come upstairs, Tobin. I wanna talk to you."

Here it came, Bob thought. He followed the bulky manager's lead up the spiral stairway, preparing himself for the scene that was coming. In Dan Pawley's office, he blurted,

"If it's about me missin' that line drive off Sussman's—"

"Siddown." Pawley's voice was strangely restrained, almost gentle. Bob couldn't understand it. The manager said conversationally, "Guess you know this club's got a twelve o'clock curfew, Tobin?"

Bob nodded.

The manager said matter-of-factly, "Just thought I'd remind you. That was a nice poke out there."

Bob frowned. This wasn't Dan Pawley. "Th-thanks," he said weakly.

"You're a good ball player, Tobin. You keep hittin' the way you have been and we'll cop the ribbon. We'll be pretty near in, if we can cop the two games left of this Blues series. Long time since I copped a ribbon."

Bob didn't know what to say. He kept silent.

The manager continued, "I ain't much worried about you. You're a natural ball player. It's born in you, I reckon. At nineteen, you can bust a lot of trainin' before it tells on you."

Bob said, to keep it from becoming a completely one-sided conversation, "I'm no born player—really. My pop's a lawyer. He never played, and there's never been any real athletes in the family—at least, not that I know of. 'Course, Pop was always a fan, but—"

"You're a born ball blayer," said Pawley. "Someday you'll realize it, maybe. You can make a great career for yourself, in baseball. You take Frank Coombes though, or Danny Kelly, they're *made* ball players. Up a couple of seasons, then down to the minors is all they can hope for. They're only holdin' on because of the war. So they ain't tossin' away much, with their dissipatin'."

Bob said carefully. "I'm beginning to get it, Dan. I am. Is that what you're saying?"

Pawley sighed. "I know how your mind works, youngster. Just like me, when I was your age. You're young, and you're wild, and you don't wanta miss nothin'. You're crazy for girls, you wanta find out how much rotgut booze your stomach'll stand up under, you're a wild young bucko and life's your oyster." He paused, letting his eyes rest on Bob's. Surprisingly, there was no rancor in the normally sour features. Bob was amazed at the older man's understanding of his mercurial nature.

"Bull's-eye," he grinned. "Why deny it?"

"No use," agreed Dan. "I know something else about you. You can't be pushed. I can bawl my lungs out yellin' one thing at you, and sure as it's hot in hell, you'll do what I tell you not to. You don't like t' be pushed. All right, then. I'm not goin' to tell you nothin',—not in so many

words—but I'll say it like this, Tobin. I don't stand for much pushin', neither. You heard my reputation, I reckon. I can be patient, if enough depends on it. But by God, there's a limit." He was still retaining that quiet conversational tone, but the words carried conviction. "All right, that's all, I reckon."

Bob turned slowly out of the room. All the way down stairs he kept scratching his head, wondering at the reasonableness of Pawley's words. Instead of a tongue-lashing, it had been more of a heart-to-heart talk, like a father trying to reason with a wayward son. It was certainly more effective than hard words would have been, Bob thought, and wondered again at Pawley's amazing insight. The old boy seemed to know Bob inside and out, to know exactly what would and would not go down with him.

The team glanced curiously at him. Bob was quiet, serious looking. There were smiles here and there. They all apparently thought he'd had a real going-over up there.

Kelly said sympathetically, "Snap into it, Bobbo. We gotta go places an' do things."

Bob hesitated. The way he felt now, it didn't seem right to bust curfew two nights in succession. Dan had been swell to him up there. But the team was all staring at him, waiting to see if the manager had him properly hogtied, like most of the others. Bob was only nineteen, and saving face was important to him. Besides, another night on the town wouldn't hurt him. Hadn't he come through with a homer today, and won these deadpan teammates a ball game?

"Okay," he told Danny and Frank. "I won't be more'n five minutes."

He started kicking his spikes off, grinning a little in anticipation of a good time tonight. He'd try to be in before curfew. With things as they were between him and Dan, he'd better not louse up tomorrow's game. As Dan had said, he didn't stand for much pushing, either.

IN the last half of the sixth inning, the next afternoon, Bob made his third error of the day, an error so flagrant and inexcusable that even his most loyal rooters hurled epithets at him.

It was 3-0, favor the Blues. The Blues had men on second and third, two down. Tony Perria, the enemy shortstop, got under one of O'Dell's pitches. It was a high blooper, a fair ball, arcing out toward where Bob stood between first and second.

He maneuvered beneath it, flinging a hand up to signify his intention to take it. The sun was bad. As well as he could, he shielded his eyes with his glove. At the last minute, he tried to get his mitt under it. But a tuft of wind caught it, deflected it slightly.

Bob jabbed desperately for it, knocked it away from him. There was a roar of alarm from the crowd as base runners scurried about the paths like frightened rabbits. Bob pounced on the ball, fired it home. He was too late to catch the man there. Another run was in for the Blues, and the bases were still thickly populated, all because of the senseless bobble. The next man popped out to Chuck Waldron, behind the platter, but it was 4-0 now, favor the Blues.

Bob slouched guiltily toward the dugout. He had failed to hit in three trips to the plate. He had muffed a putout, letting his foot slide off the sack in the second, and he had allowed a line drive to blaze right through him.

He had been a very bright boy about three o'clock this morning, when he and Danny Kelly had helped Frank Coombes through the hotel lobby to the elevator. Bob had been unable to get away from the pair of night owls at midnight, when he'd intended. They made the rounds of a half dozen bars, and they'd all drunk more than any man should, in celebration of Bob's dramatic homer.

Now Bob's mouth felt like the inside of a dusty old shoe, his head throbbed madly with each pulse beat, and his eyes stung, objecting to the bright sunlight.

Dan Pawley hadn't said anything yet, but his gimlet eyes didn't miss a trick, and several times he looked Bob's way with reflective venom. The blast was surely coming this time, but Dan was smiling grimly and biding his time. It was as if he wanted Bob to get himself in deeper and deeper, so he'd have no comeback.

Bob couldn't stand it. He was young, he was a cocky sort, and he didn't like the feeling of guilt that Dan's silence forced

on him. He took a deep breath in the dug-out and faced Dan Pawley.

"Why don't you say it, Dan? What you're thinkin'. I know I've got it comin' to me. I—"

"You're on deck, Tobin. Grab a stick an' get out there."

Bob sighed and went. He could hear some of the others gasping at Dan's reaction. He was gasping himself. He didn't get it. Why did the manager reserve such gentle tactics for him alone?

It still bothered him, at the plate. He swung hopelessly at the Blues' hurlers' offerings, came back to the dugout. Danny Kelly whispered strangely,

"Old Dan's gone nuts. My guess is he's losin' his grip. You've got some kind of an Indian sign on him, Bobbo."

Coombes shook his head gravely. He looked thoughtful. "Somethin' tells me Dan's about through, as a pilot." There was a strange shine in Frank's eyes, which were normally pale and lifeless. "I wonder . . ." he said slowly.

"What?"

"Who'd take over—I mean—if Dan did fold up?"

Danny said softly, "You been up here awhile, Frank. You'd stand a pretty good chance. It'd be nice, huh? Zowie, think of it, you handlin' the Bisons!"

Coombes sober face showed that he *had* thought of it, often. He said deprecatingly, "It's daydreamin'. That's all. It'll take more'n this to knock Dan over. But the way he's lettin' the kid here back-sass him . . . listen, Bob, you sure you ain't got nothin' on him?"

Bob stared at Coombes with a sudden distaste. He did not like the turn the whispered conversation had been taking. Pawley hadn't done anything to hurt these two men. Why should they be plotting to undermine Dan's position?

"No," he said. "Why?"

"Nothing," Coombes grunted. "It's just . . . I had an idea."

The idea seemed to bother Coombes during the final innings. Bob had marveled at Frank's ability to come in blind drunk at three in the morning and still play fair baseball. He supposed it was a matter of practice, of inuring one's self to the liquor. But in the ninth inning, Vern Grant, the Blues' second baseman, slapped a line drive

straight toward the red-faced third sacker.

Frank let it go through him and the man stretched the scratch hit for two bags, driving a run in. There was no further score, but the final tally was 7-0, favor the opposition.

Pawley let loose a torrent of abuse on Coombes in the showers. "You yellow-bellied punk," he thundered. —"You lousy rundum! That bobble's costing you fifty. Talk up, go ahead, damn ya, an' I'll make it a hundred. Maybe you think I'm so hard up for players I'm afraid to can you. By Go—"

Danny Kelly broke in, "Aw, take it easy, Dan. Maybe you got a gripe an' maybe you ain't. But Frank ain't the only one on this team that wasn't up to scratch today."

That, Bob thought strangely, was for me. Danny meant me. Thanks, pal, he thought sourly. I'll remember that one. Then he was listening to Dan Pawley's acid inflections again, this time directed at Danny Kelly.

"You're dead right, Danny. You looked like a tenpin out there in left field. You weren't asked in this conversation. That crack'll cost you fifty too, while we're on the subject."

"But—" Danny looked sore. "Hey, What the—"

"Any more cracks?" the manager asked coldly.

Kelly said sourly, "You're drivin', I guess. I know where my bread's buttered."

"Act like it. You're makin' good dough. More'n you're worth. Stay outa barrooms and concentrate on the baseball!"

THE manager turned on his heel and swept out of the room. There was a long, painful silence. Then Danny was grating, "How d'ya like that? The kid here pulls four bobbles, bats none for six, and *we*—" he indicated Frank Coombes—"catch all the hell from his highness. I tell you, Dan Pawley's goin' nuts. He's crackin' up. He's the guy the front office oughta get rid of."

There were a few half-hearted nods from some of the others. Plainly, Pawley's tirade had them guessing. They couldn't understand the injustice of it, making scapegoats of Coombes and Kelly, when Bob was the real offender.

Harry Burrell said soberly, "He's sure actin' funny. Darn shame, I call it. We're pretty close to grabbin' the flag. I could use some o' that series sugar. But Dan'll cool down. He's tough, but he's always been fair. That's the part that beats me." He sent a significant glance in Bob's direction.

Bob said guiltily, "All right, I was the guy had it coming. I don't understand it any better than the rest of you."

Coombes was talking in a low voice to Kelly. "Maybe Bill Tendler could find out the answer. He don't stop at nothin', Bill don't, as long as he figures there might be a hot story in it for his lousy newspaper."

Bob moved over toward him. He was interested. "Whaddaya mean? The guy's a reporter?"

"Right," Frank grinned. He kept his voice down. "Here's the idea. We sic Tendler on the thing. He's got ways of findin' out things, bein' on a paper and all. If anyone can figure Dan's angle, treatin' you with kid gloves and lambastin' us others, Tendler can do it. The guy's a bloodhound. If he comes up with something red hot, we'll have old Dan right where we want him."

Bob said distastefully, "And that's good?"

Frank said, "You're kidding."

"Dan Pawley's treated me pretty square," Bob said stoutly.

"He'll turn on you yet. He'll hit you low, when you're not lookin' for it. You wanta come along tonight, Bob? We'll probably find Tendler down at the Circle. He hangs out a lot down there."

Bob didn't like it. He could feel the team watching. It was crazy, crazy for Kelly and Coombes to go to a barroom again tonight. It would be crazier still for him to go with them. But strange as it seemed, he had grown sort of fond of Dan Pawley. These men were up to something, trying to undermine Dan's position. Bob wanted to stop them, but he didn't come right out and say so. No use putting them on guard, he thought sensibly. His friendly feeling toward them had been revised abruptly, but he grinned at them now and said,

"Okay, why not?"

Just then, he saw Chuck Waldron step

out from behind the high lockers near which he'd been standing. Chuck might well have overheard part of their conversation. He was pretty close to Dan Pawley, and Bob worried about it a little, then promptly forgot it. Grown men didn't bother eavesdropping, carrying tales to the teacher.

Oh, no? At ten that night, as he stood at the Circle's long bar with an untouched beer before him, he had to reverse that decision. Frank Coombes had found his newspaper friend, Bill Tendler, and the reporter had promised to search the office files for any item on Pawley that might explain the manager's strange attitude toward Bob Tobin.

Bob was curious about it himself, but he was thoroughly disgusted with the entire proceedings. It was all he could do to pretend that his friendship toward the two conspirators was intact: He promised himself this was the last night he'd ever spend with them.

He was standing there with his untouched beer, thinking those things, when Kelly's voice rasped close to his ear:

"Holy sufferin' catfish! Take a look at what just came in!"

It was Dan Pawley. His florid face was a storm warning to all three. Bob had never seen a face so livid with unbridled fury, and he tensed, wondering just how the manager would take out his wrath this time.

Pawley stepped up quickly behind him, spun him bodily. Bob started to grunt with anger. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a huge fist materialized. He could just see it coming, straight for his jaw. He tried to get his left hand up, but was too taken by surprise to manage that simple maneuver.

The bludgeoning blow caught him right on the button. He went crashing into the bar. The edge of it bored deep into his floating ribs, bent him over with searing pain. The manager growled angrily, "Stand up and take it like a man, you young punk. You've had your picnic."

Bob tried to hit back. Another blow landed on his temple. He teetered backward again. It seemed impossible that a human fist could hit that hard. He took another punch on the chin, went falling helplessly forward. He saw the floor rac-

ing up to him. He hit with an awful wrenching thump, and then a dark blanket seemed to settle upon him.

THE insistent buzzing of a telephone woke him. He was in his room, he saw strangely. Danny Kelly was on the foot of Bob's bed. Frank Coombes was talking into the mouthpiece to someone. "Yeah?" he was saying. "Yeah, that sounds like it might be somethin'. Thanks for buzzin' me, Bill. Keep on this thing, will ya? If you ask me, it's somethin' red hot."

Kelly said, "What'd he say?"

Frank turned toward Bob. "Come to, hey, kid? Listen, Tendler says Dan had a kid, a boy. No one seems t' know what become of him. He'd be about your age, nineteen. Is there any chance—" he was embarrassed— "well, what I mean, if you was his kid, that'd explain the way he's been actin'."

Bob fingered his jaw and made a wry face. "You mean this? Hell, no. I'm not his kid. How could I be? My name's Tobin."

"But—if you was adopted—"

"I wasn't," Bob said. "Tell your pal he's up the wrong tree. That idea's plain silly."

Coombes scratched his chin. "Dammit, there must be *some* reason for the way Dan's been actin'. By the way, how you feelin'? He sure threw 'em into you!"

As if, Bob thought in an ugly humor, anyone had to tell him. His ribs still ached where he'd hit the bar, his face felt like pulp. His heart blazed with cold hatred for the sour-tempered manager who had first coddled him, then caught him off guard and made a fool of him in public.

He said, "I owe you boys an apology. I should've believed you, that Pawley's bad business. From now on I'm with you a hundred per cent. You think we can really bust him, if we stick-together?"

Coombes grinned. "That barroom brawl with you ain't gonna help him any, for one thing. The team ain't very solid behind him. He'll lose games from now on, and the public's sure to turn on him. A little of that, and the owners'll can Pawley. No man's so big in this game he can buck the boys in the bleachers. They make the final decisions."

Kelly said thoughtfully, grinning at Bob. "Me, now, I ain't felt so good lately. Wouldn't surprise me if I played kind of lousy tomorrow."

Bob felt his sore chin and again the cold hatred surged in him. "I don't need a diagram, Danny. Me, neither."

In the first inning, Kelly dropped a fly ball off Rudy Knapp's willow, and Rudy made second on what should have been a popout. Harry Burrell mowed down the next three batters, however. The enemy could not score that inning.

In the second, Coombes muffed a ground ball, allowing a scratch hit. Later, he failed to run down a base runner who tried stealing third as Burrell let a pitch go. Frank was the fastest man in the Bisons' infield, and some eyebrows lifted then, but he stood blandly in position, as if unaware what his teammates were thinking about him.

Bob realized it was dirty, it was lousy, it was a far cry from baseball and all the game stood for, but he had seen the paper this morning. Pawley had made a laughing stock of him. Bob couldn't stand for that, nor could he discover one redeeming feature in the manager's treatment of him. Why couldn't the guy at least have tried to be honest with him, instead of teasing him along, making Bob think things were hunky-dory. Pawley had been just giving him rope, Bob knew now, rope with which to hang himself. Well, it was cute, it was a trick, it had gotten Pawley's name in headlines and enhanced his tough legend. But Kelly and Coombes had fashioned the way for Bob to fight back. They were working with him.

Two weeks from now, he thought grimly, there wouldn't be any Dan Pawley in baseball. He'd be nothing but legend. And a hollow legend at that!

In the fifth inning, the Blues loaded the bases. Tony Perria came up and Burrell sent him down swinging. With two away, Vern Grant, a heavy hitter, stalked to the plate.

He hit the first ball Burrell offered, but popped up short to Bob's position. Bob watched the pill dropping toward his outstretched glove. He told himself over and over he was going to muff it, he was going to bobble the ball on purpose. It would be a sure run for the Blues, if he did so.

But at the last minute, his instincts proved too strong. He caught the ball neatly, and stood there looking dumbly at it. He moved in toward the dugout glumly. Coombes loped in beside him and whispered tightly, "Whatsa matter, kid? Getting chicken, are ya?"

"Ah, nuts! There's plenty of time. Besides, that ball was a cinch. I couldn't have made a bobble convincing."

He was sore. He hated himself for lacking the courage of his own convictions. He hated Kelly and Coombes for leading him into trouble in the first place. Most of all, though, he hated Pawley, the man who had played with him as a cat with a mouse, and who had made an ass of him in public.

They were a spiritless bunch in the dugout. Three men can influence a group of nine without a word passing, and the "don't-give-a-damn" attitude of Frank Coombes was catching. The others could feel it. They resented it, but could not help half-succumbing to it. It ruined their pepper.

Pawley said, "You act like a bunch of old wimmen out there. For God's sake, show some pepper. We gotta win this final game in the series, I tell you, if we want to stand a chance for that ribbon. Don't that Series dough mean anything to you gazabos?"

Apparently not, because they marched to the plate and back without so much as a nibble.

Bob found himself almost feeling sorry for the man he hated. It was tough, he thought, what Pawley was going through, watching your team go to pieces in the stretch race for the flag. The old man had not given up, like some of the others. There was still fight left in him.

A messenger boy came into the dugout with a telegram addressed to Coombes. Kelly went over to see what was up. Bob saw Danny pursing his lips, saw Frank glancing curiously toward him. He went down the bench toward them. "What's up. News from your newspaper buddy?"

Frank stammered, sticking the yellow paper into his pocket. "No, it—it ain't that. Personal stuff, Bobbo. You wouldn't be interested."

Something fishy about the man's eyes made Bob wonder, suddenly. He was in

a sour mood, unwilling to be brushed off or played with. He said, "You're stalling me, Frank. We're in this together. Let's see the wire?"

"Take it eas—"

Bob took it, but not easy. He reached out quickly and snatched the crumpled wire out of Frank's pocket. Frank would have grabbed for it, but Danny Kelly laid a restraining hand on him.

"What's the use, Frank. He'd have to know, sooner or later. It'll be spread all over t'night's papers."

Bob let his eyes run over the large print swiftly. It said: "Tobin is Pawley's kid. I can prove it. See for yourself in this afternoon's papers. Thanks for the tip. Tendler."

Bob was stunned. Pawley's son. He couldn't believe it. He had never had any reason to doubt that the man he'd always lived with was his rightful father. It seemed incredible, outlandish, now to be told that another man was his father.

He heard that man's voice bellowing throughout the dugout: "What the devil you guys think this is, up there? A chin session. What's all the excitement there, Tobin? You look like a ghost."

Bob went down and handed the telegram to the manager. "Is this true?" he asked slowly.

PAWLEY read it. His red face blanched, then his big jaw went grim. "Damn Tendler! They're all alike, these newspaper guys. This ain't the first time they made a mess of things for me." Bob thought of the story about Pawley getting in trouble years ago, being banned from baseball. The newspapers had probably had a major role in that business.

He said, "But is it true? Are you—my father?"

Dan Pawley looked up wearily, sighing, "No use denying it, is there? Cat's outa the bag now. Yes—I'm your old man." His brown eyes twinkled, and Bob thought with surprise that they were just like his own, brown and wide-set. "Wanta make something of it?" the old man said gruffly.

Bob's brain spun dizzily. Now it all made sense. Somehow, crazy as it seemed on the surface, this rough old-ball players' ball player was his father. That explained the way he'd acted toward Bob. Like any

fond parent, he'd tried to coax Bob into line, and failing that, in desperation, the old man had tried to knock sense into him.

Bob felt a surge of self-recrimination sweeping over him. He had no real reason to hate Pawley. The man had only been trying to help him, from the very beginning. And Coombes, Kelly . . . sniping at Pawley, trying to use any trick that came to hand to blast Pawley out of his pilot's position. Bob had, he decided, a lot to make up to the thick-set man before him.

He said gruffly, "Yes. Yes, I want to make something of it. I wanta make up for the way I've been acting. I'm just a spoiled kid, and now I can see it. I wouldn't've been, if I'd had you to raise me. But it's not too late to change. You said I was a born ball player. From now on I'm going to try to act like it."

Pawley grinned. "Sounds good," he opined, "from where I'm sitting."

Bob grinned back at him warmly. Their side was down. It was time to get out there. He was like an unruly horse, champ-ing the bit, eager for action. A whistler off a Blues bat finally came his way, riding high and hard. He had to jump for it. He just got his mitt to it, but he hung on to it. One down, and Burrell glanced over warmly at him, taking heart from the unwonted display of pepper. The pitcher put them away in order.

Danny Kelly was up. Bob walked out of the dugout with him. "Danny," he said, "get a hit. I'm not kidding. You blow this ball game and I'll bash your teeth in. Maybe I'm not one to talk, but from now on things're gonna be different. Get me."

Danny looked at him. He licked his dry lips. "Listen, you won't talk, will ya? Listen, if Pawley knew—"

"I won't talk," Bob said. "Only—don't make it necessary."

Kelly went up and poled out a single. He hit carefully, placing the ball, as if his life depended on getting a safety. Paul Hibbard went out. The Blues' pitcher walked him. Jack Schiff went out and knifed a grounder through the infield, loading the bases.

Bob was up. This was the time, he was thinking. There would never be an-

other chance like this to make up for the rotten game he'd played yesterday.

The pitcher was afraid to pitch to him. Bob was afraid the man meant to pass him. He waited, he watched three balls sail past him. A ball swept in front of his letters, just nicking the corner for a strike.

He took a firmer grip of the bat, dug his heels in. The man would have to put them in now. He watched the wind-up, watched the hurler's leg lifting. Here it came. It was a curve. Bob didn't like it. He let it go, started loping toward first. The ump's voice yelled "Str-i-i-ke!" and Bob came back.

Now he had his man in the three-and-two pocket, he thought, smiling grimly. He stared blandly at the lanky moundsman. The man was nervous. He kept glancing behind him at the crowded bases. With the score at 0-0, the guy was in a pretty bad pocket. He would have to gamble on getting Bob out. Another called ball would force in a run.

The man tried his swift on Bob. It was nice. It was straight down the line, a whistling bullet. And it was down near the belt, where Bob really liked 'em.

He stepped in, swinging with all he had. He kept his eye on the pill till the very last minute. He felt the solid impact in the handgrip, and he dug in hard down toward first.

The crowd was yelling like crazy now, and he looked over hopefully, thinking maybe he'd turned the wonderful trick of poling a homer with bases loaded. That was too much to hope for. His eyes found the ball out in center field. It had all the steam anyone could have wanted, but its arc was low. The outfielder saw it would hit the wall, and set himself to nail the rebound.

Bob dug in and got his legs chugging. He rounded first and laced out for second. He had time to try third, he saw, and now he got really going, taking all the stops out. He was late, he saw. The coach was waving frantically at him. He left his feet, sliding. He came up against the third sacker in a cloud of dust, dislodging the man.

He got up quickly, straining his dust-filled eyes to gauge what had happened. The third sacker had flubbed the ball.

One look, and Bob was racing wildly for home. He had to slide again, but it wasn't really necessary. The throw from third was hurried, wild, from a man who just been shaken up badly. The catcher had to step off the plate to take it.

Bob lay there a couple of seconds, holding the rubber. There was a wide grin on his face when he got up at last and went into the dugout.

Pawley's eyes were a little misty. His face had lost much of its sternness, and he looked around at the assembled faces. "Anyone have any objections," he asked slyly, "if I was to compliment my own son on a nice show of pepper?"

They all just laughed good-naturedly at him. There was a different spirit, suddenly, in the Bison dugout. Bob said, panting a little, "Look, I still don't understand. How come I'm—I mean, how could you be my father?"

DAN PAWLEY led him to one end of the long dugout, where they could talk without being overheard. "When I was banned from playing your mother divorced me. You weren't more'n a month old then, and she died less'n five months later. I wasn't in no position t' raise a kid, and besides, I didn't see no sense havin' you grow up as my son, under them conditions. Kids would rag you to death, when it come time for your schoolin'.

"I knew Tobin and his wife always wanted a son, but couldn't have one. I turned you over to them. It was a good home for you. I told 'em never to tell you you didn't really belong to them. They kept that promise. You'd never have known, except for that snoopin' reporter. He's been sending telegrams all over the country. He found out your birthday from some sort of public files back where you come from. He had 'em search for a birth certificate in the name Bob Tobin, and they naturally couldn't turn one up. You were born Bob Pawley."

"Then—how did he know? And—how'd you find out—I mean, what he was up to?"

"Tobin phoned me this morning. Some friends had called him to tell him what way the wind was blowing. As for the reporter—well, he found a notice of your

birth in the file of nineteen-year-old papers down at his office, I reckon. It'd be easy enough for him. The two birth dates checked, so he figured you *had* to be Bob Pawley."

Bob felt a bit strange in the older man's presence. It was hard to have to change

IRON MAN

When it is noted that the most games in which a pitcher saw action in 1944 was Joe Heving's total of 63, the marvelous performance of Big Ed Walsh with the Chicago White Sox in 1908 is truly appreciated. Toiling in no fewer than 66 battles, Walsh appeared in 464 innings and was credited with 40 wins and 15 setbacks, plus one tie. He was removed from the box just once. He yielded only 343 hits and 112 runs, fanned 269 and walked 56. He uncorked 10 wild pitches and balked twice. Truly an iron man on the mound.

identities after nineteen years; it was stranger still to think of this man, whom he'd so recently hated, as his father. "I—I remember you said once I was a born ball player. I can understand that now. You sure had me guessing though. You seemed to know just what I was thinking, sometimes even before I'd thought it."

His new-found father smiled. "You're just a carbon copy of your old man, kid. I was a wild one myself, at your age. That's what helped me get into that trouble. I hated the yoke, just like you do. I hated it so bad, I let my hatred lead me straight into trouble."

Bob said gulping, "Thanks—er—Pop—gee, that sounds sorta strange, right at first. I mean t' say, thanks for pounding some sense into me last night at the Circle."

Dan Pawley gave him a friendly pat on the shoulder. "Think nothin' of it," he said in a gruffly pleasant voice. "If I hadn't taken you by surprise, they'd've been pickin' *me* up off the footrail."

Dan thought of Frank Coombes and of Danny Kelly. There, he decided, was some unfinished business that needed tending. But why bother Dan Pawley with that? The manager had enough troubles already. Bob would make Frank and Danny his own business. Bringing that pair into line, he decided, would be a pleasure.

After all, he thought happily, a real son does whatever he can to help out his father.

LITTLE NAPOLEON

By John Drebing

Did McGraw tinker too much with his hurlers? Was he an overbearing martinet? What did the players think of him? A newsman who traveled the circuit with the game's greatest master strategist sets down an intimate account of John Joseph McGraw.

"**A**ND SO," said the short, stoutish man with the round, florid countenance, white hair and piercing eyes that took on a sharper glint as they appraised the young ball player standing before him, "I am to believe that two days ago, on your way to this ball park, you were standing on a corner in the rain waiting for a cab. One came along with a couple of strangers in it. They stopped and asked you to hop in. A few blocks farther the cab stopped in front of a house. They said they were going in for just one drink and invited you to join them. Is that right?"

"Yes sir, Mr. McGraw. After all, it was raining, so I knew there wouldn't be a ball game and I figured there would be no harm in having just one glass of beer before reporting to the clubhouse."

"And so," continued the portly man, "you went inside. It turned out to be a speakeasy. You had one glass of beer and that is the last thing you remember until this morning when you came to. Somebody helped you on with your coat and pushed you in the street. Except for a dollar bill, your pockets were empty. They had taken you for everything, and the drug they gave you had you out for nearly forty-eight hours, right?"

"Yes, Mr. McGraw, that is just about how it happened."

"And you came right up here without stopping any place?"

"Yes, sir."

For a full minute there was a deadly silence. Then, leaning across his desk, but still speaking quietly, the old man said:

"Nice ring you've got on that finger, Hughie. The diamond alone must have cost a cool thousand."

Another pause, while the young man standing on the other side of the desk sud-

denly found his eyes glued on the ring as though he had never seen it before. The old man droned on:

"Funny, those stickup fellows who took your roll, your wallet and everything else you had overlooked that sparkler. Or did you maybe find it as you came strolling up here to the Polo Grounds?"

A pinkish color began creeping up from the young man's collar. It suffused his handsome, Irish face and reached to the tip of his ears. There was another minute of silence. And then it came. . . .

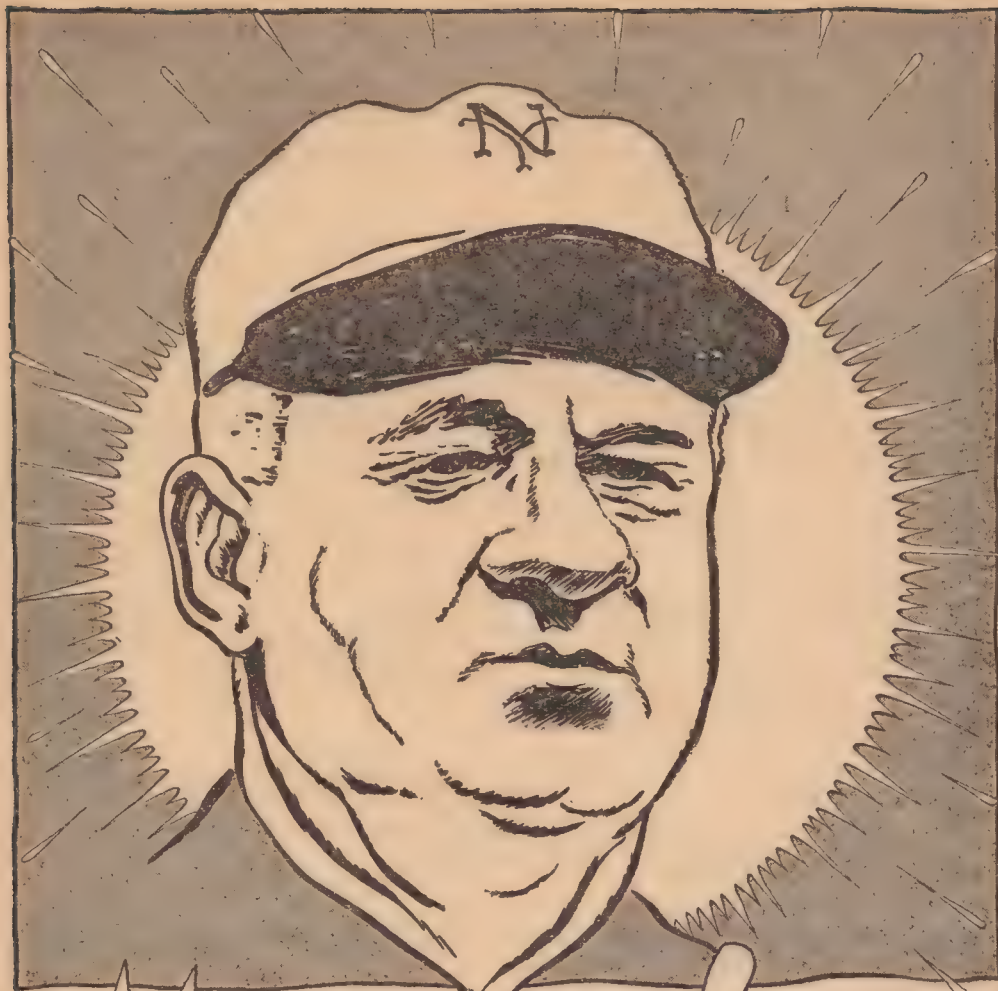
Like a clap of thunder the walls of the historic clubhouse shook as the old man blistered the abashed player.

"You bum, you tramp," bellowed McGraw. "For two days I've been wondering where the hell you've been. Yesterday we lost a hell of a tough game which you might have saved. And now you come to me with this cock and bull story about having been drugged and robbed. Boy, I'll rob you, McQuillan, this will cost you exactly two hundred bucks. And if you don't pitch this afternoon as I know you *can* pitch, the fine will go up another hundred. Now, get out."

As he trooped out into the locker room to join the other players, there doubtless was murder in the heart of one Hughie McQuillan, ace righthander of the Giants of those turbulent baseball days of the mid-twenties. Verily, he could have sliced the old man's throat.

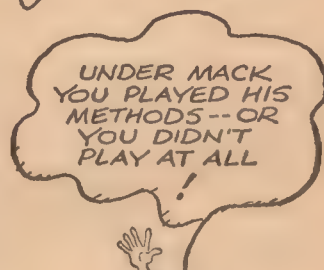
Yet years later, as McQuillan narrated the story to me there was a merry twinkle in his eyes, and he laughed as he said:

"Man and boy, there was never another like him. Those eyes of his missed nothing, on or off the ball field. He'd bawl the devil out of us after losing a ball game and slap us with fines left and right. Yet we all loved the old guy, and I'd give any-



McGRAW!

WALTER GALLI



...THE "LITTLE NAPOLEON" ... BASEBALL'S MASTER SHOWMAN--AND PIONEER... HE RULED THE GIANTS WITH AN IRON HAND --BUT HE TURNED OUT SOME GREAT STARS AND GREAT TEAMS

!!

thing if I could just pitch one more year for him. He knew baseball from A to Z. The game will never forget him."

And apparently it will not. For though more than a dozen years have passed since McGraw stepped down, the legend of the Little Napoleon carries on unabated.

FOR thirty years he managed the Giants, skyrocketing from the cellar in 1902, to a position of constant power and influence in the National League. In three different eras he developed picturesque championship teams that reflected his own dynamic spirit.

In 1904 and '05 it was the Giants of the immortal Christy Mathewson, Joe McGinity, Roger Bresnahan and Mike Donlin. From 1911 to 1913, inclusive, it was the Giants of Larry Doyle, Josh Devore, Arthur Fletcher and Buck Herzog, a team that literally stole three successive pennants as they set stolen base records that to this day remain untouched.

In 1921 he attained the peak of his powers as he won four pennants in a row with headliners that included Artie Nehf, Hughie McQuillan, Ross Young, Pancho Snyder, Frankie Frisch and George Kelly.

That was the period, too, which was to see the meteoric rise of Babe Ruth of the rival Yankees, and, though eventually the mighty Bambino was to bring about an almost total eclipse of McGraw's extraordinary triumphs, the Little Napoleon waged a terrific fight before his sun went down.

Even in the closing years of his reign, from 1925 to 1932, when pennants no longer graced his efforts and life became one of bitter frustration, McGraw and his Giants continued to capture the headlines as he came up with a fresh crop of youngsters such as Travis Jackson, Bill Terry, Melvin Ott and Carl Hubbell.

For though success no longer followed his trail in those declining years, he never lost his grip as the game's master showman and No. 1 pioneer. Once he took a baseball troupe on a world tour to play in the shadows of the pyramids of Egypt and before the crowned heads of Europe.

The day McGraw resigned, Lou Gehrig achieved a batting feat which not even Ruth had ever matched—hitting four home runs in four successive times at bat. Poor

Lou. A few paragraphs was all the sports pages could devote to this rare performance. McGraw's retirement took up most of the space that day.

To this day there is no mistaking the indelible imprint he left upon the game in general, and his league and ball club in particular. Since McGraw's departure thirteen years ago, the Giants have had only two managers. Both were players the Old Man reared from baseball infancy. The first one was Bill Terry who bossed the club through 1941. The second was Melvin Ott, who back in 1925, had come to McGraw a youngster of sixteen and eventually developed into the greatest of all McGrawian luminaries—the all-time home run champion of the National League.

As for the remainder of the league, there are now no fewer than four other clubs besides the Giants who are managed by men grounded in the McGraw school—Billy Southworth, Cardinals; Frankie Frish, Pirates, Bill McKechnie, Reds, and Freddie Fitzsimmons of the Phillies. Add to this list Casey Stengel who in the last decade managed the Dodgers and the Braves, and you have a total of seven major league pilots, all products of the master.

Small wonder, then, that younger fans still ask: What sort of man was this Little Napoleon?

He was, as he once was so aptly described by his one-time great shortstop and first lieutenant, Dave Bancroft, one of the most fascinating of men because "there were more traits in his make-up than a porcupine has quills."

To which Casey Stengel added:

"You can say that again and again. You never knew what McGraw would do next. He would be all laughter and fun one moment, splitting your sides with a story or practical joke, and the next minute he'd be a veritable Simon Legree breaking the whip over his baseball slaves. He'd fine hell out of us, yet let him find out you were in serious trouble and his hand would be in his pocket to help you out—for any amount."

Money in itself meant virtually nothing to him. He spent with a lavish hand in and out of season and his generosity among indigent ball players, prizefighters,

jockeys and actors were positively astounding. During the Giants' training stay in Los Angeles, McGraw's hotel suite was daily the noon meeting place of a host of old-timers who would drop around for a spot of lunch, and on departing, would be slipped a fiver or a sawbuck with which to try their luck at the track that afternoon.

YET when it came to signing a holdout player demanding more money than the Old Man thought he was worth, he would fight the issue down to the last dollar. Once he refused Mike Donlin, then his star outfielder, a raise of \$1,500. Turkey Mike, as stubborn as McGraw, not only held out that spring, but the entire year. His absence, very probably, cost the Giants the 1908 pennant.

However, McGraw was always extremely fond of Donlin and in the years that followed, Mike, whenever down on his luck, had only to wire McGraw for help and a check would be in the mail the next day.

Years later McGraw had an even more unusual experience with his star third sacker, Freddie Lindstrom. Freddie, having slumped a bit the preceding year, had been sliced \$1,000 in his contract, a cut he refused to take. Manager and player met in Havana that February and there were frequent wranglings over the pay slash.

Finally came time to report at the training camp in San Antonio. When McGraw arrived he was surprised that Lindstrom had not yet showed up. He waited a few days, found out that Lindy was basking on the sands of Miami Beach. Very much exasperated, he got his recalcitrant infielder on the telephone.

"What's with you?" demanded McGraw. "Don't you know you ought to be in camp?"

"Why should I?" replied Lindy, one of the few players who never had any compunction about talking right back at the Old Man. "I told you I wouldn't take that \$1,000 cut and until it's put back in the contract, I won't sign."

"I thought we had settled all that in Havana."

"No we didn't."

"Well, I'll tell you, Freddie, what I'll

do. I've already told Mr. Stoneham (Charles A. Stoneham, owner of the club) that you accepted terms. It will look silly for me to tell him now that you didn't. So, if you promise me you'll behave yourself, hustle, keep in shape and sign the contract the club sent you, I'll pay you the difference out of my own pocket."

"That's O. K. with me, Mac," replied Lindy and hung up.

The season opened and rolled on nicely until about June or July when Lindy took note of the fact that McGraw hadn't made a move to pay the difference. "Came an afternoon on an open date in the schedule and the pair met at Belmont Park. McGraw was elated. He had just had a fine stroke of luck, something that never came to him regularly at a racetrack as on a ball field.

"I just had five hundred down on that 2-to-1 shot in the last race," beamed the Old Man, "and am a cool thousand to the good."

"That's swell," said Lindy, "now you can hand that thousand right over to me."

"What do you mean, hand it over?"

"Why, don't you remember our little conversation over the phone last spring when you said you'd pay me that \$1,000 difference if I signed the contract with the cut in it."

"By God," said McGraw, "I just wanted to see whether your memory was as good as mine. Well, here's your thousand. But let me catch you breaking any training rules and I'll have your entire bankroll."

IN the handling of his men McGraw was perhaps the strictest disciplinarian the game ever saw. Eleven-thirty was the curfew hours in training camp and on the road. Woe to the player who overstayed his leave by so much as a couple of minutes.

Explosive, dynamic, he had a vitriolic temper which more than anything else enhanced his flare for showmanship. His appearance on the field was a challenge to a hostile crowd, and while the fans in the cities outside of New York hated him, they packed the stands to see his Giants play.

One afternoon during World War I, he took particular delight heckling a group of Cincinnati fans who for a time were giving as good as they were receiving.

After the game they followed McGraw to the clubhouse, continuing their lung-barrage. Finally an upstairs window opened. McGraw stuck his head out and shouted:

"Cincinnati, bah. The home of the Huns!"

This threw the good burghers, many of German origin, into such a towering rage they had to call the police riot squads to escort McGraw to his hotel.

Such demonstrations, however, were sweet music to McGraw who had a penchant for saying things that created uproars.

Once, on an exhibition tour in Cuba, there was a long Latin ceremony preceding one of the games in Havana. The Governor-General—this was before the era of presidents—was making an extraordinarily vociferous speech with all the necessary gestures, when McGraw remarked out loud and to no one in particular:

"Any chance of shutting up this damn windbag and getting the ball game started?"

Unhappily, the remark went right into the ear of an aide who also happened to understand English very well. In no time a hectic free-for-all was under way as irate members of the Cuban General's staff demanded McGraw's immediate arrest, while the promoter of the game frantically tried to restore peace and order.

Finally it was decided to let McGraw stay to the end of the game after which he was hauled off to jail where Bill Klem, the umpire, of all people, eventually bailed him out. This, to McGraw, was doubtless the crowning indignity of the day for nothing could possibly have scorched him more than to receive a helping hand from an umpire.

McGRAW remained an implacable foe of umpires right up to the last. He needled them mercilessly and by reason of his remarkable memory quite often reminded them of incidents they believed had long since been forgotten. An avid reader of newspapers, he one day chanced to see a brief item of a minor league umpire getting himself clouted over the head with an umbrella wielded by an irate fan. Ten years later, just before an exhibition game in the South, he was amazed to see

this same umpire's name appearing on the scoreboard as the arbiter for the afternoon.

For about three innings McGraw didn't say a word. Then opportunity finally came his way. As the unsuspecting umpire called "strike" on a ball wide of the plate, McGraw bellowed from the dugout:

"Hey, you blind bum, better duck, here comes that guy with the umbrella again."

The startled umpire whirled around in his tracks fully expecting another onslaught, while the crowd roared with laughter.

However, there was one shaft against which McGraw himself was not wholly invulnerable. Nothing could throw him into a more violent tantrum than to be called "Muggsy."

One day just before a spring training game in a college town in the west, a local broadcaster was doing what he doubtless considered an admirable job of keeping the spectators informed, by means of the public address system. During the pre-game practice he especially spread himself in calling attention to the various Giant players such as: "That's Mel Ott taking his cut at the plate—standing over at first base is Bill Terry—that's Roy Parmelee warming up," etc. Then, a few moments before game time, there came through the amplifiers:

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, you see walking out on the field and over to the Giant dugout, the greatest manager baseball has ever known—the one and only Muggsy McGraw."

Turning purple with rage, McGraw kicked a water bucket the length of the dugout, bawled out what players remained within range and unwittingly threw his luckless young pitcher, Parmelee, into such a dither that Roy went completely to pieces. He walked a couple of batters, smacked the next one in the ribs, unfurled a wild pitch and was well on his way to giving up another base on balls when McGraw cupped his hands and bellowed out of the dugout to his coach:

"For God's sake, get that blinkety-blank humpty-dumpty out of there and show me somebody who can pitch."

As a rule, though, McGraw was extremely careful in his handling of young players, especially if they had talent. Not until they had become well seasoned and

enured to his schooling did he give them the verbal massaging he usually bestowed upon all his hirelings when he thought they needed it.

THERE have been few men in baseball able to size up any given situation on a ball field as quickly, or keep an eye on so many places at once, as McGraw. Just as in the case of Hughie McQuillan's diamond ring, nothing escaped him.

We still vividly recall the opening game of the 1932 world series, played in the Yankee Stadium between Joe McCarthy's Yankees and the Chicago Cubs, then managed by Gabby Hartnett. McGraw had already retired as manager of the Giants, but he still kept a keen interest in baseball. He wrote for a press syndicate that distributed his articles to newspapers throughout the country. I, at the time, happened to be his collaborator, or "ghost writer," as it is more popularly called among the boys in the trade.

Incidentally, McGraw was one of the few celebrities in sports who took this particular work seriously and made a real job of it. There was none of that, "Oh, write anything you like so long as you don't make me look silly or get me in trouble." He always insisted on taking a direct hand in the preparation of an article and made certain that his ideas were properly expressed. Up to the time of his death in 1934 I do not believe I ever wrote a line for McGraw which did not directly express the Old Man's views.

The Yankees had literally hammered the ears off the Cubs, winning, 12 to 6, in the 1932 series opener, and this in itself irked him no little as he always hated to see teams of the rival American League, especially his bitter New York rivals, walloping clubs from his own league. However, he never let this interfere with his policy of judging plays impartially.

Immediately after the game we sat down in a corner of the press box and he rattled off the highlights of the contest in addition to giving his views on the various strategic moves that had come up that afternoon. He never minced words, or straddled an issue. If he thought a particular maneuver on the part of a manager had been bad, he came right out and said so.

"Incidentally, "replaying" a ball game

through the eyes of McGraw was in itself most extraordinary. He never kept a single note, yet every play seemed to come up vividly before him as though he had kept a detailed scorebook. I had my own book before me yet he never asked me once to refresh his mind on any play.

When he had finished he said, "I guess that covers about everything. Is there anything you think I've overlooked?"

"Well," I replied, "how about a line or so on Billy Herman." He didn't seem to have a very good afternoon out there."

Herman of the Cubs, later to become one of the greatest second basemen in the National League, did have a very distressing time of it that day. This, of course, was his first season in the majors and the first time he had ever played a world series game. It did look as though the strain had proved too much for the youngster, and I knew that most of my newspaper colleagues would place quite a bit of the blame for the Cub debacle on the shoulders of the inexperienced rookie.

Twice Herman had played grounders badly. Once in particular he appeared to be badly rattled when, with a couple of Yankees on base, he came up with a ground ball, started to throw home, made another move to throw to third and wound up by not even throwing the ball to first base where he still could have easily retired the batter.

To my surprise, McGraw seemed not at all of a mind to censure the Cub second baseman.

"No," he said, "I don't see any sense in rubbing it in. He didn't have a good day, but the way the more experienced hands on that Chicago club played today, that isn't surprising.

"However, I'm glad you mentioned it as there is something you might add in our story. Herman could not have thrown that ball to first base because Grimm (Charlie Grimm, Cub first baseman) was no longer looking at him. Charlie was so busy watching one Yankee runner score and the other tear into third base, it never occurred to him that Herman still could throw to first for a putout on the batter. If anyone was to blame at all it certainly was Grimm, not Herman."

In that crowd of more than 40,000 that day we doubt if there was another soul

who had noticed this highly important detail. For with most everyone the instinct is to follow the course, or intended course, of the ball, especially with runners speeding around the bases. Since Herman never made any direct move to throw to first base, no one thought of looking to that corner of the diamond to see what was happening. Certainly none of my colleagues ever did, for the next day all wrote how the badly rattled Herman had overlooked a simple putout.

Years later, when he was no longer with the Cubs, I asked Herman about that particular day and he confirmed McGraw's observation.

SOME years ago a bitter controversy raged over the so-called "McGraw system" as practiced by so many clubs in the National League. It was stressed in particular that McGraw, essentially a "defensive" strategist, had left such an impression upon his league that nearly all its managers were adopting the system to their own undoing. By ignoring the more effective "offensive systems," as exploited by the home run-clouting American Leaguers, they were repeatedly putting themselves under a severe handicap whenever they clashed with the rival loop in world series and All Star conflicts.

The whole thing, of course, was pure nonsense. Though McGraw did stand pre-eminently as a master strategist of the defense, defensive baseball was only a part, and a rather small part, of the McGraw system in its entirety. The fact is, the McGraw system was founded upon no particular style of baseball to the exclusion of all others, but was actually all-inclusive in its scope.

Often we have been asked what the McGraw system was. It was nothing more nor less than a profound knowledge of every branch of baseball, hitting, pitching and the fielding on every position on a ball field, and it began away back in 1891 when, as a little shaver weighing no more than 130 pounds, he set out from Olean, N. Y., to carve a career for himself on the diamond.

In later years the sporting world was to know a corpulent gentleman of florid countenance and white hair, dynamic, explosive, austere and domineering. He was

known to thousands of actors, pugilists and followers of the turf. A man who spent money with a lavish hand on the one side and fined and browbeat his ball players to a pulp on the other.

But the McGraw of the ball field was an entirely different fellow and he never changed though his methods varied constantly. Possessed of a lively imagination and an inherent desire to learn and understand everything connected with baseball, he developed from the little shaver of 1891 into one of the most ingenious players and leaders the sport ever knew.

He had, among other things, the most remarkably retentive mind I ever heard of in any game, with the possible exception of the two great chess players, Harry Pillsbury and Dr. Alexandre Alekhine. Pillsbury could read a page from a book and recite it verbatim. Alekhine has played at one sitting thirty games of chess simultaneously and without sight of the boards.

I do not think McGraw ever did either of these things. At least, I know he could not play chess. But I did hear him once rattle off the first three horses to finish in the Brooklyn Handicap run twenty-five years previously and which we secretly had dug out of the files just to see if we could stick him. Not only did he come up with the horses, but the jockeys and odds as well!

This struck me as so extraordinary I asked him how he did it. But it was one thing he could not explain. He simply had no difficulty remembering any event which he had ever seen or read about.

I mentioned that I could understand how a person could recall certain events to which he attached unusual importance at the time they occurred. Such as the first major league ball game I ever saw. I was only a youngster sitting in the bleachers of the old Polo Grounds. It was 1903, the Giants were playing the Pirates and Sandow Mertes cleared the bases with a triple.

"That's right," said McGraw to my even greater astonishment, "and when you get back to New York (we were then in Cincinnati and this was about 1929) look up your files in the *New York Times* and you will find that George Van Haltren broke his leg three days later."

I did look it up and the incident hap-

pened four days later, not three. But there was a rainy day in there and only three games had been played. I guess that fooled him.

AS a player his ingenuity developed itself to such lengths that the rule makers frequently found themselves hard put to curb him. As a batsman he attained such proficiency that he could bunt off innumerable fouls. It simply wore the opposing pitcher ragged. So a rule was adopted automatically retiring a batsman if he bunted foul on the third strike.

Years later, at his San Antonio training camp, McGraw, portly and fifty but still in uniform directing things, showed us how it was done. He bunted off more than fifteen and defied his pitcher to put one over the plate that he could not bunt foul.

He made a deep and careful study of every position, knew how it should be played and if he had any set system at all it was that his players adhere rigidly to his teachings.

When a player came to him it mattered not at all whether he happened to be the great Rogers Hornsby or the rookie Andy Cohen. All were put on the same footing at the start. They were accepted as knowing nothing until they proved to him what they did know. Then, as in the case of a Hornsby, he naturally would "skip lessons." But always they had to play his way.

I recall Freddie Lindstrom giving me an "inside clubhouse description" of the day Hughie Critz joined the Giants. Hughie had for a number of years been one of the game's outstanding defensive second baseman with the Cincinnati Reds. McGraw, after much wire-pulling, finally succeeded in swinging a trade that brought him to New York. The day Critz was to make his initial bow in New York, the Old man gave him a little pep talk, doubtless designed to make the newcomer feel at ease.

"Now, Hughie," said John J., "you are coming to the Giants as one of the smartest second basemen in the game. Don't let that worry you too much. Just go ahead, do your stuff and remember you are playing in the biggest town in baseball. Make one good play and you're made."

"Well, sir," continued Freddie, "he did it on the second or third day out. It was a pip. It was on a double play ball. It started at third base and I didn't throw it any too well. In fact, as he raced over to second base the ball was heading behind him and I already thought I had blown one into right field. But with the agility of a monkey, Hughie backtracked, collared the ball, stepped on the bag and, ducking the runner, whipped the throw to first for the double play. It lifted the crowd to its feet.

"Poor Hughie. He thought he was 'made.' Within a week he was to learn he was just one of us—another dumb ball player who knows nothing. But we all learned plenty of baseball under McGraw."

And with that last remark the fiery Lindstrom contributed one more item of evidence which convinced this observer the man McGraw must have been a genius as an instructor. For of the hundreds of ball players I have come to know, I never met one who, having once played for McGraw, did not frankly admit he "learned plenty" under the Little Napoleon.

Burleigh Grimes was one of the National League's foremost pitchers for a score of years. Yet he once told me that in the one year he played for McGraw he had learned more about pitching than he had learned from all the other managers he had played for combined.

Hornsby came to the Giants in 1927 as one of the greatest right-handed batsman of all time, and an accomplished second baseman. Yet Hornsby will tell you today he, too, was taught plenty by the Old Man whose precepts he never had occasion to doubt. Once, curiously enough, he did deviate from one of McGraw's hard and fast rules and was called for it, not by McGraw, but one of his fellow players.

It happened on the last western trip of 1927 when McGraw, confined in New York with an illness, had turned the leadership over to Hornsby. Within a day or two there was a clash between the Rajah and Lindstrom. Hornsby rode Lindstrom for not showing more hustle on a certain double play ball. As a second baseman the Rajah had one of the greatest double play arms in baseball. He could whip the ball to first with scarcely an effort, yet with the speed of a bullet. He liked to make

it, too, and so, with a runner on first, he was always urging the third baseman or shortstop to get that ball to him at second as fast as possible. So he snapped at Lindy and Lindy snapped right back:

"Listen, you may be runnings things right now, but McGraw is still the manager and so long as he is we're playing the sort of baseball he's taught us. And one of the first things he's taught us is that in trying for a double play, first make sure you get that fellow going down to second. After that you can try for the double play on the hitter. That's his way and it'll continue to be my way until you're the manager. Then I'll play it your way."

One can see here how these players, in whom the McGraw "system" had been ground, bowed religiously to the wisdom of the master. And now get Bill Terry's own candid opinion of his predecessor:

"The only baseball I knew the day I took over the management of the Giants was the baseball McGraw taught me. I stuck to it because I found it sound and thorough. He taught us individually how to play our positions and demanded that collectively we play his way. Yet he never made any of us play the type of ball we could not play."

Right there, I believe Terry put his finger on the very crux of the McGrawian system, and offers at once a direct refutation of the notion that McGraw was purely a "defensive manager" who saddled his players with restrictions that eventually bridled the entire league. If this were true, how can one reconcile the fact that through the years 1911 to 1913, McGraw directed one of the most amazing offensive teams in the history of baseball. A club that literally "stole" three straight pennants on the base paths.

The Giants of 1911 set a record of 347 stolen bases that still stands as an all-time mark and almost matches what an entire league totals in stolen bases today. And when you add to this the fact that every one of those stolen bases was first signaled from the bench one begins to grasp the idea that "defensive baseball" was far from all that ever engrossed the attention of John McGraw.

It is, of course, quite understandable why McGraw appeared to stress defense above attack, because perfection of

defensive play is far more elaborate and then, too, some of McGraw's most dazzling and daring tactics were of a defensive character.

STRIVING desperately to ward off impending disaster in the final game of the 1923 world series against the Yankees, McGraw deliberately signaled Rosie Ryan, who had just relieved Art Nehf on the mound, to throw a low curve "right in the dirt" for a third strike on Ruth. He knew the Babe, anxious to "provide the kill," would swing at anything, and the surmise proved one hundred per cent correct. The Bambino did swing with tremendous fervor only to shatter nothing but air.

During the Spring training season McGraw would spend hours instructing his players in the finer points on fielding. I used to see him put in half a morning showing a young shortstop and second baseman how to work together around the all-important keystone sack.

Then would follow long defensive drills by the regulars in which plays against every conceivable form of attack were rehearsed over and over again. Breaking up the sacrifice, especially the more difficult ones with runners on first and second, slow grounders which the first baseman must field while the pitchers cover first. With runners on the bases he would fungo hits to the outfielders, and the infielders would immediately swing into set positions according to where they figured the action would be. The shortstop would move in place for a cut-off and every corner of the infield where a throw was expected had to be backed up.

McGraw rarely, if ever, called his players to task for mechanical errors, but woe to the fellow who erred in judgment when he should have known better. In such matters he ruled with a mailed fist.

One day I saw his catcher, Shanty Hogan, fire a ball to second base to break up a double steal. The throw looked perfect but to everyone's consternation, neither Travis Jackson, the shortstop, nor Andy Cohen, the second baseman, made a move for it and the ball sailed out to center field.

That evening I asked Hogan why Jackson and Cohen had let that ball go through.

"They weren't supposed to take it," said Hogan. "Hubbell should have cut that

ball off in the box. We were playing to trap the fellow on third. McGraw felt he would surely make a break for home."

"But why didn't one of them down at second back up Hubbell?" I asked.

"Not in that position. We were pitching to the batter and it would have cost either of them a fifty had he left his place. So, instead, Hubbell caught the fifty."

Imagine fining the quiet, obedient Hubbell fifty smackers. But in such matters McGraw played no favorites and knew no exceptions. That, also, was part of his system.

It was in pitching, however, that McGraw exercised his rare talents to the full and yet, ironically enough, it was perhaps here that the one flaw in his methods manifested itself. Many shrewd baseball men, Terry among them, who gave full credit to the Old Man's wisdom in all other matters, believed he tinkered too much with his hurlers.

He did really "pitch every game" for his moundmen. At least, he did for nearly all of them. Here and there he made exceptions. He once told me he never pitched any games for Christy Mathewson, his beau ideal and whose cool judgment he considered perfection itself.

And Hubbell recently told me that only in his first years with the Giants did McGraw direct every pitch.

"Later he cut it down," said Hub, "telling me only what to throw when there were men on the bases. And in his last year or two he let me pretty much alone."

But the others were told what to throw on nearly every pitch and it used to be a standing joke among opposing players to mimic Giant catchers looking to the bench before giving each signal to the pitcher. It was perhaps his one "weakness," but it had to be so because to him pitching was the very core around which the entire game revolved.

I once asked him, after he retired, whether he didn't consider he had reaped enough glory and satisfaction out of baseball. He answered:

"No. My one regret is I was never a pitcher. Pitching to me is the very artistry of baseball. Every play on the field starts with the wind-up of the pitcher."

But, as remarked before, McGraw's thoughts were never entirely confined

to defense. He devoted just as much time and instruction to hitting. He taught many of his finest hitters how to bat. He always insisted they hit to the opposite field from their natural bent. That, he pointed out, vastly increased their efficiency at the plate, and it was in this way he developed such superb batsmen as Terry and Ott.

His attacks were always varied, and the other side never knew what to expect. And, as Terry once pointed out, he never played the type ball his players as a whole could not play, although they always had to be in readiness to try the unexpected.

"He never used to let me bunt," says Terry, "and everybody in the league knew it. Yet one day he let me bunt home the winning run from third. It caught the other side flat-footed."

On one point, however, his system remained transfixed and immovable. He demanded that his men keep themselves in perfect condition and his training rules were rigidly enforced. Brought up in a hard school when players were prone to be more lax in their habits than today, McGraw at times appeared too harsh with his later players who resented these overzealous infringements upon their personal liberties. But in this he was unrelenting.

"Shanty" Hogan drew his share of this fire. The big, good-natured Irishman, who really loved the Old Man, was always in trouble, because he never bothered to be smart enough to resort to duplicity. Coming home about 2 a.m. one morning while the club was training in Los Angeles, Shanty kicked up quite a disturbance trying to open a side door to the hotel that was locked. A police officer came along and wanted to know what he was doing.

"Don't you know who I am?"

"No."

"I'm Hogan, the catcher of the Giants."

"I don't believe it."

"Well, come inside and I'll prove it."

So in they went and the night clerk properly introduced Mr. Hogan. The officer himself a son of Erin, was delighted. But Shanty was still not pacified. He insisted they wake up the manager of the hotel to make further identification and finally woke up the manager of the New York Giants! That one cost Shanty about two hundred.

I once took Hogan on a visit to some friends at a doctor's home in Pittsburgh.

"Is it true, Mr. Hogan, that Mr. McGraw fines you players very heavily?" asked our hostess.

"Madame," replied Shanty, "up in Pelham Mr. McGraw has a beautiful home and I want to tell you I've paid for every stick and stone in that house."

It was, of course, an exaggeration, as the fines went into the club's treasury. None of the money ever went into McGraw's pockets. In fact, no money ever remained very long in John McGraw's pockets.

In the Spring, McGraw always was among the first to break away for the southern training camps. He trained his players like prizefighters, and when they came to toe the mark on opening day, every man was in perfect condition to play a full nine innings.

It was his theory that the public demanded this and it was a practice from which he never deviated. And when finally, broken in health, he was forced to step down he was able to see his teachings carried on by one of his own pupils, Bill Terry, even though the two differed vastly in all other matters.

Here, indeed, were two individuals who, personally, were as far apart as the poles. McGraw, dynamic, hot-tempered almost to the point of being vicious, yet generous to a fault, intense in his hatreds, warm in his friendships. No one down on his luck ever had to ask McGraw twice. He made a fortune, had practically none of it left when he died.

Terry was outwardly cold and aloof. Early in life he had learned the value of money, and set for himself the goal of becoming a man of independent means. His friendships are few but sincere. He has done generous things, but only those directly involved ever knew of them. He is not a "mixer" by nature, cares nothing for lavish entertainment.

It was no deep secret that McGraw and Terry were never overly fond of each other. In fact, for one stretch of a year and a half, they never even spoke to each other except when McGraw gave his orders on the ball field. Yet, with all this, each entertained a profound respect for the other.

IN Terry, McGraw saw a player who took baseball as seriously as he did himself. A fellow who, by sheer perseverance, developed himself into a superb batsman and one of the great fielding first basemen. Also, one who followed orders implicitly, no matter what he thought of them privately.

"I always did what he told me to do," says Bill, "and even though I knew he never liked me, I guess that was why we somehow managed to get along."

And Terry saw in McGraw a man who, in many things, he couldn't understand at all; whose harsh tactics he at times heartily disliked even when directed toward others, but whose keen baseball knowledge he appreciated at all times. Terry literally soaked up all the baseball McGraw taught him.

I do not think McGraw actually liked naming Terry his successor. But, loyal to his organization, he set aside his prejudices and finally gave his consent. For I also know Terry would never have been made manager had McGraw insisted upon someone else.

The McGraw system ceased in the Old Man's declining years when, hampered by illness, his players "got away from him." He was a much sicker man than he ever suspected in 1931 and 1932. When Terry took hold he quickly snapped the system back to life.

WHAT a pity it was McGraw never lived long enough to see perhaps his greatest protege, quiet little Melvin Ott, don the Giants' managerial robes with the retirement of Terry after the close of the 1941 campaign. Many of us, too, have often wondered what McGraw's reactions would be were the Little Napoleon around to see the once shy, self-effacing Ott, now in the driver's seat, showing excellent leadership qualifications.

That McGraw would be surprised seems reasonable to suppose for I doubt whether the Old Man ever looked upon the boy from the Louisiana bayous as being of managerial timber. But then he scarcely had had an opportunity for knowing. Mel still was only a kid of twenty-three when McGraw stepped out.

That McGraw, however, even long before this, regarded Ott as one of the great-

est players ever to come into the National League, and his own No. 1 product, can be accepted without question. True, up to the last, McGraw always insisted that the dashing Pep Young, right fielder during the early days of the twenties, was his all-time favorite among the players he personally had handled. But at the time he was saying this it must be remembered the ill-starred Young's career had already been terminated by a fatal illness, while Master Mel was still a long way from his peak.

Nearly all fans are fairly familiar with the story of Ott's early development under McGraw, how the pudgy little sixteen-year-old from Gretna, La., recommended by a New Orleans lumberman, Harry Williams, arrived at the Polo Grounds late in the 1925 season with the modest belief that he might be a catcher. Asked by McGraw whether he had ever played any other position, little Melvin gulped and made a reply that still gets a laugh around the Giant offices:

"I played the outfield a little, when I was a *kid*."

From that day on McGraw's handling of the boy was a masterpiece in player development. He needed only one look at that flawless batting swing to appreciate that here, indeed, he had garnered a rare prize. McGraw refused to farm him out.

"I'm not letting some over enthusiastic but dumb minor league manager ruin this boy," said McGraw. "He stays right in New York with me."

In the weeks that followed, McGraw had difficulty restraining his own enthusiasm, for almost every day brought fresh evidence that little Mel had an amazing store of latent talent. Catching was ruled out at once, but Mel quickly showed he could play either infield or outfield. McGraw finally decided to make it the outfield, and once master and pupil concentrated upon this it wasn't long before Ott established himself as one of the majors' topflight gardeners.

Ott's hitting, however, came in for even greater attention. For while it is probable that Ott, a lefthanded pull hitter with plenty of natural talent, could have started right off belting home runs into right field stands, McGraw visioned far beyond that.

He determined to make Ott an all-around hitter, forced him to learn to stroke the ball vigorously toward left field and paid particular attention to the boy's development against lefthanded pitching.

For nearly two seasons after Ott's name began appearing in the Giant lineup, McGraw refused to let him play when the opposing side worked a southpaw.

"It isn't the boy can't murder most of the lefthanders right now," explained McGraw one day, "but I don't want to run the risk of having him run into a lefty whose delivery might bother him and then give him the complex that he can't hit any lefthander."

The result of it all was a finished product that was to terrorize pitchers right up to today and become the National League's greatest home run clouter of all time.

In his disciplinarian tactics with Ott he was just as careful. For though the Old Man was as fond of his likeable pupil as though he were his own son, McGraw never showed any favoritism and when Master Mel occasionally violated a rule he caught it as soundly as the next.

One day Mel found himself on the carpet for having played cards that morning, a very important "don't" with McGraw who considered card playing in the forenoon bad for the eyes. Mel's excuse was that, as it was raining, there wasn't any likelihood that there would be a game that afternoon. But the excuse made no impression and Mel heard himself sentenced to a \$50 fine.

Later that season, Ott went on a particularly spectacular hitting streak. He had hit about nine homers in a week and thinking he had the Old Man in good humor he asked, after considerable hem-hawing, whether the fine could not be rescinded. Mel still wasn't getting much money then and recovering that fifty would have come in mighty handy. He wasn't kept long in suspense.

"Young man," said McGraw, "I slapped that fine on you for your own good and the fine sticks."

Nor was Ott the only infant prodigy to be developed by McGraw. For at the very time he was rearing Master Melvin he had such other youngsters on his club as Travis Jackson, Terry, Hubbell and

Lindstrom, all of whom also became top-flight stars.

A REGISTER of all the players that performed under McGraw's thirty years with the Giants would in itself make a most interesting story. They covered every conceivable type. A stern master who forebade his players from taking anything more than an occasional glass of beer, he nevertheless grappled at various times with some of the foremost two-fisted drinkers in the game. Tops in this group was Bugs Raymond, an eccentric right-hander of McGraw's earlier years with the Giants.

McGraw always insisted Raymond had more natural pitching ability than any pitcher who ever lived, not excepting Mathewson or Walter Johnson. But he was about as dependable as the weather in March. He would absent himself for days at a time and fines simply meant nothing to him at all. In fact, Bugs rarely received any money, as McGraw always made it a point to send the pay checks to the pitcher's wife. Still, by one ruse or another, Raymond always managed to raise the wherewithal to keep himself amply supplied in drinks. He was a constant problem to McGraw.

Once, when Raymond had fervently promised to ride the wagon, McGraw engaged a detective to trail the pitcher home. The next day Bugs was confronted with this report:

"You stopped at 145th Street and had four gin rickies and ate three scallions. At 125th Street you had three more rickies and five scallions. At 116th Street it was four highballs and two scallions. What have you to say about that?"

"It's a damn lie, Mac," replied Bugs, "I never ate a scallion in my life."

Great as were his triumphs however, McGraw committed two blunders which he rued to his dying day. The one was inducing the late Charles A. Stoneham, then owner of the Giants, to oust the Yankees as tenants at the Polo Grounds. This forced the two Yankee owners, Col. Jacob Ruppert and Col. T. L. Huston, to erect the huge Yankee Stadium which, filled to capacity by the glamorous and spectacular Babe Ruth, was to play a large part in the overshadowing of the

once proud Giants by their less favored city rivals.

The other mistake was his row with Frankie Frisch, brilliant second baseman, a row which resulted in the Fordham Flash taking his gifted talents elsewhere. McGraw actually always liked Frisch, another of his "boy wonder" developments, because he saw in him much of the dash, fire and temper of the McGraw of an earlier day. Perhaps it was because the two were so much alike that they were destined to drift apart.

The blow-off came in 1926 in St. Louis when, after the loss of a particularly nerve wracking game, McGraw gave the Flash a terrific bawling out. Instead of answering back, as he usually did, Frisch this time walked silently to the clubhouse. In a cold rage he packed his things and grabbed the next train for New York. He swore he never would play for the Giants again, and in this McGraw heartily concurred.

When the club returned to New York a week later, mutual friends patched up the quarrel and Frisch did finish out the season at the Polo Grounds. But that winter he was traded to the Cardinals for Rogers Hornsby.

It was a move that McGraw later deeply regretted. For when illness forced him to resign in 1932, Frisch, he frankly admitted, was his first choice to succeed him. But Frisch, still a fine player, could not be obtained from the Cardinals and McGraw finally agreed to give Terry the job.

Had Frisch been his appointed manager in 1932 it is quite likely McGraw's last years would have been much more pleasant than they were. It was no secret that they were exceedingly bitter.

When he stepped down and named Terry he said, in characteristic fashion:

"Bill, you're absolute boss. I will not interfere with anything you do. I am remaining with the club as vice president and I will be available for advice any time you want. But you will have to ask me for it."

And when Terry, determined to show he could run a ball club strictly on his own, never came near McGraw, it hurt the Old Man deeply.

However, the old warrior remained a champion to the end. And when Terry lifted the Giants out of the second divi-

sion in 1933 and drove them to a pennant and world series title McGraw appeared as enthusiastic as if he had achieved the triumph himself. He attended all of the games in that series, and after the victorious Giant party returned to New York on the night of the final game in Washington, he ordered a rousing victory celebration in the ballroom of the New Yorker Hotel.

HE had come a long way from the boy who, born amid total obscurity in Truxton, N. Y. in 1872, had grown to become the most widely known man in baseball. As a lad, the son of an Irish immigrant, he worked on a farm, did other chores, all of which he thoroughly hated, until he got a chance to play baseball. His first job with a semi-pro team paid him five dollars a game and then, over the strenuous objections of his father, he dropped everything to play ball professionally for the munificent salary of forty dollars a month for Olean.

He was only eighteen then but his rise was meteoric. By 1895 he was the star third baseman of the legendary Orioles of Baltimore and with the turn of the century he was the most talked of player in the country, one of the key figures in the organization of the new American League.

At the last moment, however, he switched his allegiance to the National League, which was then fighting desperately to thwart efforts to launch a rival major league. Given the opportunity to come to New York as manager of the Giants in 1902 he electrified the baseball world by lifting the National League's hopeless tailenders into second place in 1903, and to pennants in '04 and '05, with a smashing world series victory over the American League's champions in the latter year.

From then on his fame soared. On and off the field he seemed continually to move from one brawl to another. Tutored by that master showman of the nineties, Ned Hanlon, manager of the Orioles, McGraw was the first manager to expand spring training and develop it into the elaborate program it became up to the time of the present war. In 1905 he took his Giants clear across the continent to train in San Francisco. He strove con-

tinually to better living conditions for the players, elevating them from the atmosphere of boarding houses until eventually

INSANITY BAIT

Rookie shortstop (glove cupped, yelling to second baseman): "How many are out, two or three?"

Second baseman: "Two."

SS (after a moment's thought): "That's right. If it was three, we wouldn't be out here, would we?"

they were to find themselves housed in the swankiest hosteleries in the land.

And yet for all the furore he caused and the lavish parties he tossed for his friends, his home life was singularly quiet and free from all ostentation. He married Miss Mary Blanche Sindall of Baltimore in 1902 and the two remained deeply devoted. Away from the turmoil of the diamond they lived and entertained quietly in a large, comfortable house in Pelham.

It was thought by some that McGraw might easily have made a success had he embarked on any other vocation in life. But the actual records seem to doubt that. His favorite diversion was horse racing and he lost heavily in that. At the behest of friends he dabbled in Florida real estate and saw what fortune he had wiped out in the crash of the late twenties.

Essentially, therefore, he was all baseball, and in this he had, indeed, come a long way. And as he took part in what to was to be his final celebration with the triumphant Giants of 1933, he may have had every reason to look back on a great career that entitled him to a life of peace.

But he was out of the picture and he knew it and try as he would he could not make his life a happy one. He had lived hard and fast and in all his years he had moved in a tempest with himself stirring up most of the action. He was still only sixty-one and many of his close friends had hoped he would be able to enjoy the peace and comforts of retirement. But those who knew him best also knew this could never be.

For the only peace and comfort he was to know came to him the following February in 1934 when, after a brief illness, he passed away to take his place in Baseball's Valhalla among the game's all-time immortals.

JINX INNING

By Tom O'Neill

Blast it, Duke Mill thought. This kid couldn't be as bad as the big league grapevine made him out . . . not if he was anything like his Dad.

DUKE MILL leaned forward in the field box behind the Panther dug-out and his gaze riveted on the slender kid with the over-long arms toeing the mound. Mill hadn't pitched eighteen years in the big time without being able to tell when a hurler was blowing up. Slater was unraveling fast.

"Up, up, balloons go up! Pick out that stratosphere pitch and bomb it over the fence!"

The chant of the coach at third base came through cupped hands. Oddly, the thoughts of Mill were suddenly of another Slater, and of two occasions which were indelibly etched on his brain. Confused pictures of a girl named Mary were superimposed. Blast it, this kid was the son of Mary and that other Slater. He *couldn't* be the kind of guy that whispers over the big league grapevine had made him out.

Mill watched the kid toe the rubber, stretch and whiplash his left arm across his body. The motion lacked the free, easy looseness of earlier innings. The ball was fast, had a hop on it, but it was eight inches wide of the plate.

"Ball three-ee-ee!" The umpire droned.

A loose-jointed, bandy-legged man in the shortfield slot signalled the umpire. The arbiter called time.

Buzz Biglow, player-manager of the Panthers, strode to the mound. His freckled face was red and his solid neck bulged. His stormy dark eyes bored into the kid pitcher.

"Your arm all right?" Biglow demanded in a voice that could be heard in the stands. The youngster nodded. "Then get in there and fog that agate down the alley!" Biglow glared, added, "Or else!"

His bandy legs twinkled across the grass to his shortstop spot and Biglow

pounded his glove, yelled his perennial battle cry to all chuckers.

"Pour that rock in there! Make 'em hit to get on!"

Duke Mill scowled there in the field box. That was no way to handle a pitcher. Especially a green kid shaky enough because of previous failures.

Baserunners danced off first, second, and third, did all they could to rattle the young southpaw. Slater cut loose a pitch and Duke held his breath. There wasn't a thing on the ball but the cover. It was a letter-high heave, right down the slot. The hitter leaped at that fat pitch. Ash and horsehide collided with a crack like a howitzer.

Out in deep leftfield the Panther gardener took three steps toward the barrier, stopped. He watched the little white sphere disappear into the second deck. Biglow stalked angrily to the pitcher's mound.

"Get out!" the manager shouted. "You ain't got the guts of a jellyfish! Get outa my sight before I forget myself!"

THE next day Slater sat disconsolately on a bench in the clubhouse. He didn't know what to expect. Biglow had phoned that morning, early.

"Report at the ball-yard at ten o'clock."

Slater was dressed and waiting when the door to the little office the manager had in the corner of the clubhouse opened. Biglow and a wide-shouldered, husky man came out. The big man eyed Slater and it seemed a friendly scrutiny. Biglow made no introduction.

"Mill, here, thinks he might be able to help you, Slater." The restless black eyes of the manager flicked from the youngster to the big fellow. "Personally, I don't think there's any help for you!"

"In my book you're another one of these high school flashes that lacks what it takes when the chips are down. The blasted scouts are so hard up for ivory now-a-days that when they catch one of you kids on a fair day in a sandlot game, right away they've got another Bob Feller!"

Biglow stalked from the clubhouse with no further word. Slater looked at the big man. There was something about him that was familiar. A slow easy smile wrinkled the bronzed face of the newcomer.

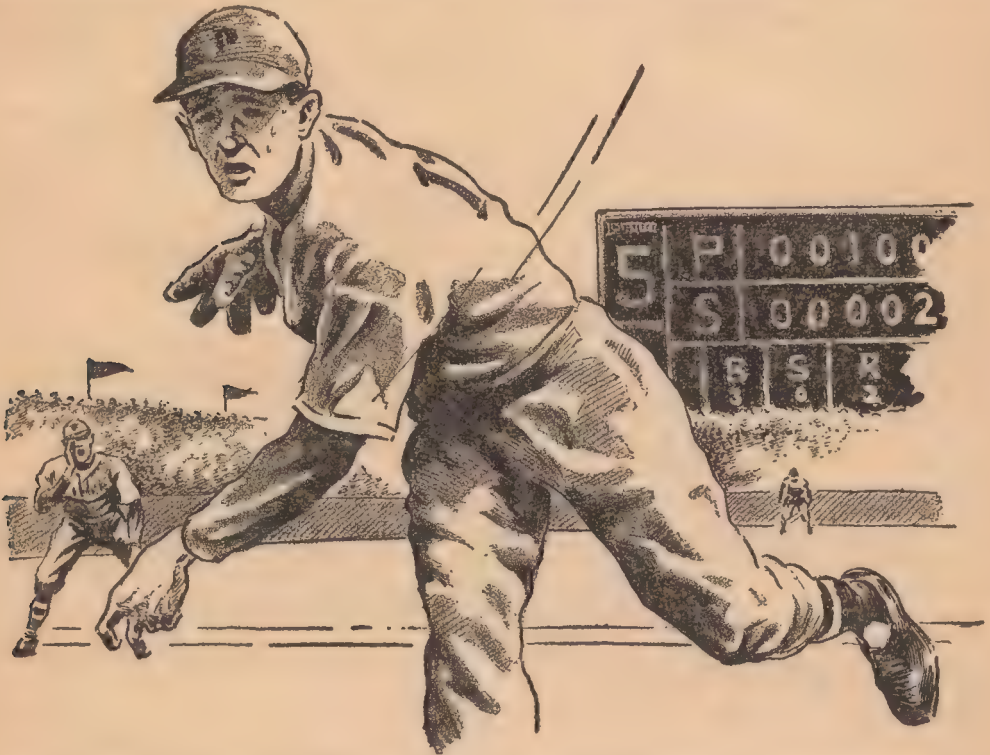
"I've got to make good!"

"I watched you work yesterday," Mill said. "You looked mighty sweet until the fifth. What happened?"

"I don't know," the kid said bleakly. "It's been like that. I lose my stuff, blow higher than a kite, along about the fifth inning."

"I'm trying a sort of comeback with the Panthers," Mill said. "Combination relief pitcher and coach. Maybe we can do something about you."

He looked curiously at the youngster,



"He could be wrong," Mill said. "I believe he is on you, kid—and Duke Mill has seen a lot of chuckers come and go."

The boy jerked his gaze to the big man.

"Duke Mill! I—I—gosh, Mr. Mill, my dad took me to see you pitch once! Dad used to say you was the smartest righthander since Grover Alexander!"

The big man's grin widened. "Thanks for the tonic to my ego, kid," he said. "Let's let it go that I managed to get by in the same company with Old Pete. He and other real chuckers taught me plenty when I broke in. Maybe I can pay off a little by passing some of it on to you."

Mill eyed the youngster, said, "I take it you're really keen to make good?"

added, "Sometimes a fellow can strain so hard at a job that he beats himself. Why do you *have* to make good?"

The kid sucked in a long breath and let it out.

"I've always dreamed of pitching in the big league," he said. "My dad would have been a big league pitcher, if he hadn't lost his pitching hand in the other World War. Dad was killed seven years ago but I know that he hoped someday I'd sort of carry on for him. Then there's another reason. It sounds crazy, maybe, but the very thing that gave me a chance at big league pitching is the biggest reason I have to make good. So I can go on into the thing I've got to do."

Duke Mill gave the kid a peculiar look but said nothing. The youngster's square-cut face was set in earnest lines as he went on.

"I'll be eighteen next October. I'm already enlisted in the Air Corps Reserve and they'll take me when I'm eighteen. My mother will get my allotment, of course, but—well, fifty dollars a month isn't much, Mr. Mill. I've got to make good with the Panthers so I can leave mother a good sum to take care of her while I go to war."

Slater didn't note the odd something that flickered across the back of Mill's eyes. Duke dropped a hand on the youngster's knee.

"We'll do our best to lick this jinx for you, kid," he said softly.

SLATER and the veteran worked out together that morning. Mill watched the kid closely. At the end of an hour Mill called a halt.

"I can't see a thing wrong," Mill said. "You've got a kind of half-sidearm delivery, but it's a nice smooth motion. Your fast ball hops and your curve is better than average. Only thing I can figure is that you've had a couple of sour frames in the middle of games you've worked and created a mental hazard for yourself."

He threw his arm across the shoulders of the young southpaw.

"You can lick that. All you need is confidence."

Duke Mill told Biglow substantially the same as he'd told the kid the day it was Slater's turn to pitch again.

Biglow grunted. "You call it lack of confidence; I call it lack of guts! He's going to stay out there today, if they knock his ears off!"

The kid blazed along for three frames before the opposition got the semblance of a hit. In the fourth they reached him for two singles but he struck out the last man.

Duke Mill was in the bullpen. Slater looked out there as he started for the hill for the jinx inning. Mill held up his glove, motioned as though throwing it away.

"I won't need it today," he shouted. "Keep in there, kid!"

Slater tried valiantly to fight off the tightness he felt stealing over him. He worked slowly. He got a two-and-two

count on the leadoff man, tried to come across the inside corner with his curve. The batter fell away, saw the ball breaking at the last instant, poked weakly.

A blooper looped over short just out of reach of Biglow. It was the flukiest kind of scratch, but it fell safe for a hit. Bench jockeys climbed aboard the kid.

"Here we go, here we go! The balloon's up!"

"All ready for the stratosphere hop!"

Slater set his jaw, hitched up his pants. He went to work carefully on the second hitter. Too carefully. He missed the corner on a three-and-one pitch.

"Get in there and fire that rock!" Biglow yelled. "Make 'em hit to get on!"

The kid buggywhipped his arm, cut loose his Sunday pitch. He knew the instant the ball rolled off his fingers that the jinx had him again. He had no more control than a burglar turned loose in the Treasury.

The man at the plate slapped a three-and-one cripple against the rightfield fence. Then another walk. A scorcher through the box. A long triple to the flagpole.

Five runs in and nobody out. Biglow signalled for time, waved toward the bullpen. The manager came to the pitcher's mound, kicked dirt, fumed and cussed.

"I shoulda known better than to listen to Mill," he said harshly. "Of all the gutless, bottomless, would-be chuckers I ever saw, you take the tin medal! You'll never be anything but—"

"Hold it, Biglow!" Mill had hustled in from the bullpen. "Don't say anything you wouldn't want to eat. I spotted what's wrong with the kid!"

"Hah! A blind man could see what's wrong. He just ain't got what it takes!"

Mill said quietly, "It might be that the kid could use a little encouragement and I'll be the one to see that he gets it."

"So, that's it, huh! Pussyfooting around after my job! Well, maybe you'll get it. Then you can play your way with this lousy—"

"Are you making a change of pitchers, Biglow?"

The query came from the umpire. Biglow glared at the blue-clad arbiter, growled, "Mill for Slater, change of pitchers." He eyed Slater. "If you want to call him a pitcher!"

The youngster walked dejectedly to the dugout. He was lower than the drainage pipes beneath the the diamond. He might as well pack and get out.

HE hung the white flannel shirt and pants on a hook in his locker, draped the bright orange and black stockings over the uniform. His personal belongings made a little pile on the floor. He was heavy-hearted. He knew that Biglow hadn't been fooling.

The squad trooped into the dressing room from the field. Biglow rushed to his little compartment with never a glance at the kid. Mill came directly to Slater.

"I—I'm sorry," the youngster said lifelessly. "Maybe Biglow won't hold it against you, Mr. Mill."

"Biglow isn't holding anything against anybody right now," Mill said brusquely. "And put that stuff back in your locker."

Slater looked anxiously at the veteran.

"Don't get yourself in bad for me, Mr. Mill. I can take it."

"Look, kid, I'm telling you—ordering you, if you like—to put out of your mind that you're released. Biglow was handed a telegram when he came off the diamond. He's leaving the club. He'll be with the Sox before the week is out.

"I knew Biglow had acquired a block of stock in the Sox. A fellow can't hold stock in one club and play for another and Biglow chose to keep the stock. The wire he got was from the Panther owner releasing him from his contract. I've been made manager of the Panthers for the rest of the season."

Mill slapped the youngster on the shoulder.

"I'm your boss, now. And I wasn't kidding when I told Biglow I'd spotted your trouble. You unconsciously tightened out there when the jinx inning came, you didn't follow through on your pitches. Result: you lost control.

"Pull your chin out of your shoetops, kid. We're going to beat this thing—and make a real chucker of you!"

"But how, Mr. Mill. If I unconsciously stop following through, how can I help it?"

"We'll change your motion. It's been done before. We'll get you so you pitch straight overhand. You can't help but follow through then."

TEN days after the kid started working on the new pitching motion, the Panther's ace twirler was breezing along behind a four-run lead when he suddenly ran into a barrage of base bits after six innings of near-perfect pitching. Mill recognized the imminent collapse after the second hit. He sent Slater to warm up. The kid went into the game when three runs had been scored and the tying counter was on third with the potential winning marker on second and only one gone.

Slater pitched himself out of that hole like a seasoned vet. He induced one of the best hitters in the league to go after a sharp curve on a two-and-two count, got him on a fly to short right field.

He pulled the string on a honey of a change of pace pitch when the next batter was set for the swift. Slater took his easy roller himself.

He pitched a perfect inning in the eighth, getting the opposition one-two-three on five pitched balls.

In the top of the ninth, a misjudged fly in the sun field went for a triple and a minute later, with the infield pulled in to cut off the run at the plate, a lazy Texas Leaguer that the second baseman could have gobbled easily from his regular position, dropped for a hit and the game was deadlocked.

Neither team scored in the tenth. Goose eggs went on the scoreboard for the eleventh. As the kid went out for the twelfth frame, Duke Mill leaned forward tensely. Slater had now pitched four innings since he went to the mound in the seventh canto. This inning was his jinx. Would he think of that, tighten up?

The lanky youngster pumped that long left arm methodically, set down the hitters like a Lefty Grove in his prime. Mill muttered in the dugout.

"I knew a kid with his background couldn't lack heart!"

Slater kept pitching airtight ball. In the sixteenth inning his mates finally put together a walk, an infield out, and a clean hit to chase the winning run over the plate. The kid had notched his first big league victory—and he'd pitched a full nine innings to do it.

"I did it!" he chortled to Mill. "I licked the jinx! I never even thought of it!"

Mill grinned, slapped the youngster on

the back. "You worked like a real big league chucker," he agreed. "You're on your way."

Slater didn't finish another game for a month.

He couldn't escape the jinx. His mates booted easy chances; the umps missed one in a tight spot; something always happened. In a night game when he was working smoothly behind a two run lead and had two out with no one on the bases in the eighth, the lighting system went haywire.

It took half an hour to repair the maz-das and the cool night air chilled his arm and shoulder during the wait. They knocked his ears off when the game resumed.

The Sox came to town in mid-June, leading the Panthers by a single game. If the Panthers could take over the top spot they would have a big advantage, a chance to build up a lead during a long stand in their own ball-yard against the weaker clubs while the Sox and other contenders cut each other's throats. It was one of those crucial series that winning or losing pennants revolve on and the players knew it.

Duke Mill announced that Slater would be the Panther pitcher for the series opener. Hap Hazard protested.

"You're the boss," the catcher said. "And you've done a better job with us than Biglow. But I gotta tell you that the boys feel you're wrong on Slater."

"Maybe I am a little high on the kid," Mill admitted. "But I figure he's worth it. Our pitching staff is in none too good shape right now. It would help a lot if Slater can come through for us."

"If," Hazard said and shrugged.

The kid was a ball of fire that day—for four and one-third innings. Then with one away in the fifth, the parade started. The ump missed one, put Slater in the three-and-one hole, and the hitter blasted the cripple for two bases.

Buzz Biglow was the next hitter. The former Panther manager crowded the plate, swished a long yellow bat across the rubber.

"Bust that agate in here and I'll rap it down your gullet," Biglow challenged.

The kid wanted to get Biglow. Somehow the bandy-legged guy was a symbol of his jinx. He loosed his fast one down

the inside edge and Biglow slammed it—hard, but straight at shortstop.

The shortfielder bobbled the ball, pounced after it, kicked it again, then uncorked a heave nine feet over the first baseman's head when he finally picked up the sphere. The run scored and Biglow easily reached second. That did it. Inexplicably the Panther defense collapsed. Two more runs scored through no fault of Slater.

The kid's shoulders drooped. What was the use? The fates were allied against him. He didn't consciously quit trying, but suddenly his stuff was gone. He walked two men in a row. Mill derricked him.

Before the inning ended the Panthers were trailing by five runs and the Sox coasted in to a 7-4 win.

In the clubhouse, dark looks were thrown Slater's way. He went into the showers and when he came out he overheard a group of players grumbling.

"Biglow had him pegged right. A couple of breaks against him and—blooie!"

"Mill better get wise. If we lose this rag, it's that punk's fault!"

SLATER dressed slowly. It was bad enough for *him* that he couldn't conquer the jinx. But when it reached the point where Mill was being put on the pan for sticking by him, it was time to take action.

Mill heard the kid out with no interruption.

"I'm harming you," Slater finished. "The boys are saying that you're not giving them a fair shake by keeping me on."

The manager looked at him a long moment.

"There's some feeling against you," he admitted. "Ball players are that way about jinxes."

Mill drummed his fingers on the desk absently. He wasn't looking at the kid. His eyes had a far away expression. When he spoke again, Mill's tone was level.

"I told you that we'd lick this jinx and I still say we can do it. You can quit—nobody can stop you—or you can grit your teeth and show that you've got the heart to hang in there and keep slogging when the going gets rugged. That's the way your dad would have done."

The kid jerked his eyes to the manager and Mill drew in a long breath.

"Yes, I knew your dad," he said. "Slim Slater and I played ball on the same team in a little Ohio town in 1917. Two kids just out of high school. We went to Columbus together to enlist. Your dad got in. I was turned down because I was color blind. I was the one he wrote to from a hospital in France that he'd lost his hand from shrapnel wounds."

Duke Mill seemed to be talking aloud to himself more than to Slater as he went on.

"Slim Slater and I had both shined around the same girl, but it was always Slim with Mary. He was rough and harsh with her when he came home. She knew he was only trying to make her forsake him because he thought it would be a handicap for her to be married to a cripple.

"He was a fighter, proud—and so was Mary. They were married and left that community because people clucked their tongues. I was on a hunting trip years afterward when I accidentally learned that they lived in the little town in the valley near the territory where we intended to hunt. Your dad went with us to show us the best deer country."

The face of Mill was suddenly lined and old.

"Slim Slater drove the car with all the camping stuff and equipment in it while the three other fellows rode with me. He came around a sharp curve at the bottom of a hill and saw the train coming.

"Slim could have beaten the train across the crossing, but he saw that if he did I would surely have crashed into it. He swung his own car, blocked the road. I skidded on the ice and rammed his car into the train."

Mill arose from his desk and walked to the door.

"Your mother tried not to, I guess, but she felt that I'd been responsible for Slim's death. She refused a dozen times the help I wanted to give. She had courage.

"That's the kind of mother you're willing to go home to and whine that you couldn't take it and let her be a prop to you. I wouldn't want to do it."

The youngster sat there and stared blankly at the door after it closed on Mill. He was dazed. How could a fellow let

down a mother like that? Or the memory of such a dad?

In the second game of that series, the Sox and Panthers put on one of those wild affairs that sometimes happen when two clubs are taut as fiddle strings. Duke Mill had used every man on his pitching staff by the ninth, except Slater and his most reliable money hurler. He had been saving the clutch pitcher for the final game but in the last inning, after the Panthers had amassed an apparently safe 14-10 lead, Mill was forced to put his star in when the Sox clouted three runs across and had two more men in scoring position.

THE ace chucker got the last man but it was a costly putout. The hitter topped a sinker, dragged a swinging bunt between first base and the mound. The first sacker fielded the ball and the pitcher covered. He took the toss, stamped on the bag—and caught his spikes in the canvas.

He hung onto the ball but he fell awkwardly. After the umps jerked his thumb to signify the out, the pitcher got up, pale of face.

The thumb of his pitching hand was broken.

Hap Hazard voiced the thoughts of the team when he groaned, "Ain't that dandy! Every chucker we got worn to a frazzle but Mike—and he busts a thumb! We might as well give the Sox the pennant!"

"We're not giving anybody anything," Mill said sharply. "We've still got a pitcher for tomorrow." He looked at the kid then. "Slater will go for us—and win!"

Players looked glumly at each other. No word was said. Their faces were more eloquent than words.

Mill made a long distance phone call right after that game. Slater would have been interested if he could have heard Mill's end of the call.

"You've got to come, Mary. The boy needs you. Hop the first train. It's more than a ball game."

The Sox were a cocky confident lot when the kid took the mound. Slater started shaky. He walked the first man, got the second on an outfield fly, allowed a hit. A fast double play pulled him through the inning without giving up a

run. The Panthers went down in order in their half.

The Sox notched another hit off the kid in the second stanza after two were out, but with a run waiting on second, Slater outsmarted Biglow, fed the bandy-legged guy a curve in a two-and-one spot, and Biglow popped weakly to left when the pitch caught him off stride.

"Lucky," Biglow growled as he trotted to short. "You'll need more than luck to get by a coupla more innings!"

Panther bats were again impotent against the Sox pitcher. As he toed the rubber for the third frame, Slater was still pleasantly remembering the scowl on the freckled face of Biglow. Suddenly the kid felt great. His arm was loose and free. He retired the Sox in that inning on eight pitches. His fireball was alive and his jughandle was razor sharp.

"If he can keep chuckin' like that," Hap Hazard said to Mill, "I take back everything I been thinkin'. If!"

Mill glanced swiftly across the diamond to a seat in a box behind third base. A woman whose gaze never was off the slender lad sat there.

"The kid'll lick his jinx today," Mill said.

Mill's team eked out the first run of the ball game in their half of the fourth. Two walks, an infield out, and a sacrifice fly notched the marker. Mill looked across the diamond again, picked up his glove and started for the bullpen. He'd told Mary Slater his plan and she had agreed that it was good.

"No Slater ever needed a prop," she had said. "But he is only a boy. You've wanted to do something for me since—since Slim went. If you can pull my boy through, that's all I ask."

Mill could feel the tension working on the kid and his mates as that inning began. He lobbed the ball easily to the bullpen catcher while Slater worked on the lead-off hitter. The kid got the count to two strikes and one ball. Hazard signed for a curve, tried to sneak it by over the corner.

The Sox mace wielder caught it on the end of his bat. A sharp, twisting grass-cutter skittered between first and second. The umps ruled the runner safe on an eyelash decision.

Biglow piled out of the Sox dugout, grabbed a handful of bats, swaggered in front of the dugout while he poured derision at the kid. Out in the bullpen, the warmup catcher looked at Mill and spoke dolefully.

"Better really loosen up, boss. It's started again!"

The guy in the rectangle rapped a sharp grounder to short, a perfect double-play ball. But it skipped off a rough spot just as the fielder grabbed it, threw his timing off enough to spoil the play. They got the man at second but missed at first.

Biglow moved to the "on deck" spot. Slater took his time and Biglow yelled derisively at the hitter, but for the kid's ears, "He don't dare throw it up there! He's on his way out!"

It looked like Biglow had the dope. Slater missed the corner on two pitches. A strike. Then a curve broke too low. Three and one. The kid fought the yawning emptiness that came into his stomach. The umpire ruled the fifth pitch a ball.

Biglow strolled cockily to the plate.

"Here it is, Gutless!" he jeered. "I dare you to get one in here! I'll bust it into the next township!"

The umpire suddenly stepped from behind Hap Hazard, held up his hands for time. He nodded toward the bullpen at the catcher's questioning look. Duke Mill was trotting toward the pitcher's mound.

Mill came down the foul line, cut across first base and stumbled over the bag. He didn't get up, lay writhing and holding his ankle. The kid and Hap Hazard ran over there.

"I turned my ankle," Mill grimaced. "'Fraid I've sprained it."

HAP HAZARD swore, said, "You can't pitch on a sprained ankle! Now we are sunk!"

"I wasn't coming in to pitch," Mill said quickly. He looked at Slater. "I just ran in to tell you, kid, that your mother is sitting back of third. Show her how a kid of hers and Slim Slater works when the going gets tough!"

A startled look jumped into Slater's wide gray eyes. He swiveled his gaze toward the stands. Mary Slater waved.

"You'll have to get a pitcher in here, Mill," the umpire said.

"We've got a pitcher. I didn't take Slater out."

The arbiter looked funny, grunted, "Okay, play ball."

The kid walked slowly to the mound. Two things occupied all of his mind: he was definitely on his own, and Mom was in the stands. A buoyant, grim self-reliance flowed through him. He'd show Mom!

He faced Buzz Biglow. The bandy-legged guy yelled a taunt. Inside a little voice whispered to the kid, "This guy's been riding you long enough. Mow him down!"

The slender youngster busted two fireballs past Biglow. Then he fed the ex-Panther a twisting jughandle and again Biglow was caught off stride. The first baseman roared in, pounced on Biglow's hopper, flipped to the shortstop covering second and tore for the bag for the return heave.

The kid was already there. The throw was wide toward the plate side but Slater grabbed it. He slapped the ball on Biglow a second's fraction before the bandy-legged guy's foot hit the bag and they crashed to the ground as Biglow slammed into the youngster. The kid got up, shoved the hand that clutched the horsehide under Biglow's nose.

"Who's gutless!" he chortled. "Who hit into the double play in the clutch!"

That was the end of the Sox threat.

Slater stood out there and fogged that horsehide. A hit and an error in the eighth gave Panther fans an anxious moment, but the kid was equal to the challenge. He struck out two men to end the inning.

In the ninth he really bore down. His fireball smoked and sizzled. Three Sox stickers went down swinging, looking like Class D subs.

His teammates had finished slapping the kid on the back, shaking his hand. Slater sat on a bench before his locker, glowing and warm inside. Duke Mill did a little jig step in front of him and the kid stared at his manager. Mill grinned.

"Sure, my ankle is okay," he said. "I faked that fall over the bag. I wanted you to show the world that you could stand on your own feet—and you did. When a chucker can hold up under the pressure of a lone run lead and blaze that apple through there—well, kid, he's a pitcher!"

Mill stopped then, eyed the youngster.

"I sent for your mother partly because of you but mostly for me. She—she's kinda got over the feeling she had about me. I—we—well, she's having dinner with me. We want you to join us."

The kid looked up at the veteran and his wide gray eyes held a softness.

"I'll join you—later," the kid said. "And I'm wishing you the best of luck. Dad'll know, and it's what he'd want."

WHITEWASH ARTISTS

Even more exclusive than the major league society of 300 game winners is the group who, in one season, have been able to reach double figures in shutouts. There are just 15 members of this haloed chapter; Grover Cleveland Alexander, Big Ed Walsh and Walter Johnson scoring double-headers. Only two lefthanders among the 15. . . Ed Morris of the Alleghenys of the American Association in 1886 and Carl Owen Hubbell of the New York Giants in 1933. The expert whitewashers follow:

YEAR	PITCHER AND CLUB.	LEAGUE	SHUTOUTS
1876	George Bradley, St. Louis.....	National	16
1879	Thomas Bond, Boston.....	National	12
1884	James Galvin, Buffalo.....	National	12
1884	Charles Radbourne, Providence.....	National	11
1885	John Clarkson, Chicago.....	National	10
1886	Ed Morris, Allegheny.....	Association	12
1886	David Foutz, St. Louis.....	Association	11
1904	Denton Young, Boston.....	American	10
1906	Ed Walsh, Chicago.....	American	10
1908	Ed Walsh, Chicago.....	American	12
1908	Christy Mathewson, New York.....	National	12
1910	Jack Coombs, Philadelphia.....	American	13
1912	Smoky Joe Wood, Boston.....	American	10
1913	Walter Johnson, Washington.....	American	12
1914	Walter Johnson, Washington.....	American	10
1915	Grover Alexander, Philadelphia.....	National	12
1916	Grover Alexander, Philadelphia.....	National	16
1933	Carl Hubbell, New York.....	National	10

KEYSTONE CARNAGE

By C. Paul Jackson

Back from the wars . . . a doubtful hero . . . second sacker Wallace paraded himself into the perfect squeeze play. Shortstop Rigado had him marked for oblivion while a titian-haired publicist madly beat the headline drums.



HE had the driver of the cab stop two blocks from the huge steel and concrete structure. He sat there staring through the open window at the letters across the front of the towering stands. FALCON STADIUM. HOME OF THE FALCON BASEBALL CLUB.

An odd eagerness in his clear blue eyes drained slowly away and was replaced by a bleakness. Bunches of muscle jerked along the line of his jaw; and the springs of the cab seat protested creakingly as his lithe frame moved restlessly. The strong fingers of an oversize hand ran through his crisp blond hair. Despair was in the gesture.

"Thought you wanted to go to the stadium, mister," the driver said. "Cabs are scarce, I can't stall here."

The blond man jerked his gaze from the window. It hadn't worked. He had told himself that the sight of the ballyard would loosen the tense tightness inside him. He was wrong. A panicky desire to order the taxi to go on, take him back to the railroad terminal, momentarily held him. His big hands gripped the handles of his bags until they showed white at the knuckles. He forced himself to get out.

"I'll walk the rest of the way."

He didn't add that walking would give him a few minutes more to battle the dread that was in him. The words of the big doc at Naval Hospital hammered in his brain.

It's in your lap, Ensign. It's up to Cord Wallace—and only Cord Wallace. Physically, you are as sound as ever. Get your mind off your experience. Pick up the threads of your life where you left off. Circulate with your old friends, forget there ever was a war. It's up to you!

How can a man pick up the threads of the life he'd banked on since kid days, when he dreads facing the inevitable questions he knows he will have to endure?

Ever since he had been big enough to go down to the vacant lot and wrangle with other kids over who was going to pitch and who got first bats, Cord Wallace had dreamed of someday running out on the smooth green turf of this stadium. Well, the telegram in his pocket from Manager Dan Harn guaranteed that his dream was coming true, yet he had to force his legs to stride down the corridor beneath Falcon Stadium.

Dan Harn would be waiting for him in the little office around the corner at the end of the corridor. Cord Wallace knew that he had to start licking his problem

right there with Dan, if he was going to lick it, but—

Forget the war, the doc had said. Forget your experience. Yeah! Easy for the doc to say, but HOW! You don't control your thoughts by gritting your teeth and telling yourself that you're going to. Cord had learned that.

Circulate with your old friends!

The words were burned into Cord's brain. Every fibre of his being longed to do just that—and dreaded the prospect. How about Amato Rigado? Once a friend, Amato was unbendingly bitter over the loss of his younger brother. Cord had written Amato from the hospital, tried to make him understand that when Tony Rigado died it had been more to Cord

than just losing the chief of his gun crew. But Amato hadn't changed. The scene that Christmas Day of 1941 when he and Tony had told Amato that they were enlisting was still vividly etched in Cord's brain.

"This is your doing, Wallace," Amato had raged. "You're a year older than the kid, you ought to know better. You fool, don't you know we'll have those Jap monkees begging for mercy inside six months! There's plenty of older guys to do the job, they don't need you!"

"You drag Tony off into the Navy and no telling what may happen! The kid may never get another chance at big league ball like this one!"

"Now, look, Amato," Tony had said. "There's nothing you can do about it. I'm



Play ball? Cord was doubtful. He had too many other things on his mind.

eighteen and I'm going. You've got no call to hold any grudge against Cord, it's my own idea. You're just being hotheaded because Navy docs found you've got a perforated eardrum and won't take *you!*"

"Nuts!" Amato had brushed aside Tony's protest. "We're talking about you, not me. I'm warning you, Wallace, if you let the kid do this thing, you'll answer to me!"

AMATO hadn't been fooling. He had been bitter, pointedly avoided Cord even when he and Tony were home on leave after boot training. And Amato had been a wild man when he came to the hospital six months ago. Attendants had been forced to remove him forcibly from Cord's presence but before they'd taken him out, Rigado had said words that still stuck in Cord's mind.

"Get one thing straight," Rigado had grated. "Maybe the Navy whitewashes you on this deal, but I don't. In my book, you saved your own skin at the expense of Tony and other kids like him! And someday you'll pay off—to me!"

Cord Wallace sucked in a long breath there in the gloomy corridor. Rigado was bitter, hated him, and—

WHAM!

Something hit Cord a wallop in the jaw as he swung around the corner and lights crackled through his head like a string of machine gun tracers. He had a confused impression of a tallish girl and a brief case crashing backward as he stumbled over the suitcase he carried in one hand and the light bag in his other fist swung up in reflex action to keep his balance.

He didn't keep his balance.

He felt the bag jolt into the girl an instant before he sprawled to the floor and his head banged against the wall.

For a space he didn't know what had happened. Then he saw the girl eyeing him. A ridiculous little dab of blue felt dangled over one of her ears and it contrasted to the red of her hair. Not a fiery red but the rich wine-red of fine old sherry.

Her eyes were the blue-green of the South Pacific when it is quiet. They surveyed Cord speculatively from beneath long lashes and the thin arched line of her brows. He stared at her and tried to

bring from the back of his mind a haunting nebulous sense of having seen her somewhere before.

Gilt lettering on the brief case clutched in her hand read: "WTZO—Today Dramatized Program." Cord decided that he must be mistaken in thinking that he had seen her before. He'd never heard of WTZO or Today Dramatized Program.

"Well, sailor," the girl said. "I hope you aren't the navigator of your ship! Or does the Navy negotiate turns on the inside!"

Cord was abruptly sure that he'd never met her. He would have remembered anyone as cocky as she was. He felt the heat of the blood flooding into his face and knew that her remark had touched off the tense strain that had been in him for months. The quick irrational anger was one of the things he had to whip, but he couldn't fight it down right then.

"Negotiate a turn on the inside!" he spluttered. He scrambled to his feet. "How else *would* anybody make a right-hand turn! The first rule in the book is to keep to the right—and I was on the right side!"

A funny little gleam flickered in her eyes. She straightened the bit of a hat.

"Nothing like a man who speaks his mind uninhibited," she said. "The least you can do is to help me up."

Cord yanked her erect. The tense irritation held him and he said no more. She stood there and coolly eyed him and a hint of stifled laughter was in her eyes.

"Thanks," she said, then added calmly, "Nice to have met you, Mr. Cord Wallace. I'll probably be seeing you!"

She flipped the briefcase casually at him and her high heels clicked rhythmic cadence on the concrete floor as Cord stood there and gaped stupidly after her.

How about this! She called him by name! Again that haunting half-hunch that he'd met her somewhere was in the back of his mind, but he dismissed it. He cudged his brain for explanation. The initials C.W. were on the luggage he carried but that didn't explain how she knew what they stood for. He took a couple of steps down the corridor after her, but she disappeared through a door midway down the hall just as he yelled. He didn't follow because he knew the door led to a stadium gate.

Cord was suddenly shaken and puzzled and more than a little ashamed. He'd put on a pretty boorish act. Mentally he cursed the unpredictable thing in him that caused him to flash hot anger at the least provocation. She'd come from Dan Harn's office, he'd find out from Dan who she was. He certainly owed her an apology.

DAN HARN was a lean, lank man with keen eyes that had a way of stabbing out from beneath bushy brows as though they bored right into the object of his scrutiny. His face was wrinkled and leathery with fine lines etching the corners of his eyes. The lines had been acquired by squinting from dugouts across innumerable sunny diamonds, yet this was only his second season at the helm of a big league club.

"Good to see you, lad," Dan said brusquely, shook hands. "Skipping all the usual stuff, it's good from my point of view because we sure can use a second-baseman. You in shape?"

Cord grinned quickly. Same old Dan. Moving up from bossing a Class C farm club to the big time hadn't changed Dan a bit. Cord was grateful that the manager chose to "skip all the usual stuff."

"I should be in shape," Cord said. "They had a rating at the hospital who was a slave driver on conditioning stuff."

"Good," Dan grunted. "That's settled. You start right in today. You're the new Falcon second baseman."

Cord drew in a long breath. That was moving pretty fast. A lot of things were chasing around in his mind.

"No fooling at all, huh," he said. "It's okay with me, Dan, but—well, aren't there a few loose ends?"

Harn raised his bushy brows a little and shot a penetrating look at Cord.

"You played ball for me before you joined the Navy," Dan said. "You were ready then for a big league job. One of the things I did when the Falcons called me up was to arrange transfer of your contract. It'll maybe take a little time for you to get back the feel of the game, but I'm gambling that you'll do us more good than harm while you're getting re-adjusted."

"Of course, if you want it, we can arrange a kind of indoctrination period, but—blast it, lad, I thought I made it

clear in my wire that I wanted you to play ball right now."

Some of the weight that Cord had been carrying so long lifted. He felt better than he had for a long time. He knew he could count on one guy backing him to the limit and there was comfort in the knowledge.

"Okay," he said.

That was the end of the interview as far as Dan Harn was concerned. He picked up a paper from his desk.

"This is your contract," he said. "I think you'll find it generous."

Cord barely glanced at the contract, scratched his name at the bottom.

"I bumped into a girl outside," he said, grinned a little. "And that's no figure of speech. We dumped each other good. She called me by name and to the best of my knowledge I don't know her from Eve. You know her?"

"That would be Joyce Clayton," Dan said. "Her dad and me played ball together twenty years ago. She's a real dyed-in-the-wool fan and she knows more baseball than most men. She comes in once in a while for a chat." Dan looked at Cord frowningly then. "Are you sure you don't know Joyce, lad?"

"A guy wouldn't be likely to not remember meeting a looker like her, Dan. Why do you ask that?"

"Well, Joyce came to see me today—to—to—well, blast it, lad, to talk about you. She knew so darn much about you that I just naturally thought you were old friends. Now that I think of it, I might have known better. She wouldn't have been asking me, if she'd known you as well as I assumed."

"You're talking in riddles," Cord said. "What do you mean, she was asking about me?"

"She wants me to use my influence with you to give her your—ah—Navy story. She wants to put it on a program her studio airs every day."

"I'm not putting out anything for a radio broadcast!" Cord found the old stiffness flowing back into him. "That's for sure! But I can't figure how she knew me."

Again Dan Harn frowned.

"You'd be surprised how much she knows about you," he said.

CORD knew some of the men on the Falcon squad from having played with or against them in minor league ball. Slatz Kittz, loose-jointed first baseman, and the veteran Babe White, a decade in the majors and still patrolling the center-field area and rapping out those clean baseknocks when they most counted, looked and acted exactly like the pictures Cord had mentally formed from newspaper and radio accounts. Mike Madill was the same quiet, efficient workman at third base as he had been when Cord had played briefly with him in Class C ball.

He tabbed Pete Clemons and Bill Buck, veteran mainstays of the Falcon pitching staff. And Hank Seburg, the burly catcher, was easy to pick out. Ben Reft and Blacky Carroll were recognizeable out in the field shagging fungoes, and though they took it easy in this workout an hour before game time, Cord knew that they covered right and left field in adequate, big league fashion.

And there was Amato Rigado—there would always be Rigado. The stocky shortstop had been Cord's idol since Rigado had gone from the sandlot team back home into a better-than-average minor league and made the grade. Cord remembered how he and young Tony had hung on every word, copied the mannerisms, of Tony's older brother when Amato came home between seasons and grinningly passed out tips on how the professionals did it.

Cord and Amato and Tony had once looked forward to and talked about the next Spring when the three of them would wear big league flannels, maybe of the same team. Sportswriters' predictions that the Rigado brothers and Cord Wallace would form a trio of big leaguers that Dan Harn had developed from hometown talent had seemed in a fair way of coming off when big league clubs had called both Cord and Tony in the draft of minor league talent that winter.

That had been the winter of 1941, before that Christmas Day when the friendship of Cord and Amato Rigado had ended.

Tony Rigado had proved he was big league, in the toughest league of them all, but he would never have his name in another box score. Amato held Cord accountable for that sad fact—and it was

Amato Rigado who could make or break Cord now.

Cord knew too well that no two players must work closer than a shortstop and secondbaseman. If Amato Rigado chose to—

"All right, lad." Dan Harn's voice cut through Cord's thoughts. "Get up there and hit a few. Remember to take it easy. It'll take time to sharpen your eye and timing."

Cord stood up there at the plate and was a little surprised to find that he was not tense. He tried to meet the ball and *no* more. A thrill coursed through him when he found that he hadn't lost his eye, was meeting the ball squarely. He hit a half dozen with no attempt to get power into his cut and then he thought he'd try to really bash one.

He'd always had good wrists and Amato had taught him the knack of getting his weight behind his swing. He picked out a belt-high pitch and gave it all he had. The horsehide rode off the seasoned ash with the clear ring of a solidly hit ball and it was still going up when it disappeared into the leftfield stands.

Cord grinned, shifted his lithe weight in the box. He caught a second pitch that was a little outside and the ball rifled down the rightfield line with every ounce of his hundred and ninety pounds behind it. It slammed against the screen of the rightfield pavilion.

"That's enough, lad," Dan Harn said. Quiet satisfaction was in the manager's tone. "Leave a couple of those drives in that bat for the Evaders."

"Nice cloutin', kid." Pete Clemons made a point of strolling past Cord, gave a friendly grin with the words. "Nice cloutin' in anybody's league. Looks like you're what the doc ordered for us."

"Dan told us he had a guy coming along that could grab the tough ones around the keystone sack," Babe White chipped in from behind Clemons. "But he didn't say anything about you being a threat to us guys who get paid 'cause we can notch a hit now and then. You look sweet up at that dish, kid."

The friendliness of the veterans warmed Cord. The cold ball in the pit of his stomach began to thaw a little. Why, these guys were for him, they wanted him to make good as much as he wanted to.

Then he caught a glimpse of Amato Rigado. The stocky shortfielder was eyeing him and there was no friendliness in Rigado's black eyes. He stared coldly at Cord and deliberately turned away as Dan Harn called, "All right, everybody in the clubhouse."

Men in the gray Evader traveling uniforms were coming from their dressing rooms as the Falcons went through the dugout tunnel. Cord saw Rigado stop and talk briefly to a big red-faced man in Evader flannels. He didn't know why, but Cord was sure that Rigado was saying something about him to Carrot Malone, Evader coach and the hardest riding jockey in the big leagues.

CORD WALLACE moved a little nervously in the keystone spot as the Falcons took the field against the Evaders. It was hard to realize that he was starting a big league game. He'd always thought that when that day came it would be something like bands playing and fireworks and great stuff. But all he felt was an odd tightness. The aloofness his mates on the Falcons had exhibited—Clemons and White were the only ones who had spoken a word to him—rode Cord hard.

A chance remark he had overheard Carrot Malone make to another Evader hadn't helped any.

"That's the guy," Malone had said, nodding toward Cord. "Used to pal around with the kid, but when things got too rugged, it was him that come back. The kid fed the fishes somewhere in the Pacific."

Cord tried his best to get his thoughts exclusively on the matter at hand as the ump's yelled, "Play ball!"

From the first ball Pete Clemons fogged down the alley, that game was a battle that must have made Muggsy McGraw and Hughey Jennings and Uncle Wilbert Robinson wink at other members of the fighting old Baltimore Orioles, wherever scrapping ballplayers go when the Big Umpire finally calls them out. Carrot Malone was the kingpin in the Evader attack but they had their full quota of other bench jockies. They centered their vitrolric fire on the rookie Falcon secondsacker.

"Well, well, WELL! Fresh meat today!

That salty rep don't fool anybody, busher!"

"Get on first, gang, and you're as good as on third!"

"And Ole Pappy Time out there on the rubber depending on a tin hero of the briny to hold him up! Wow!"

Big Pete Clemons had been around for a long time. Jibes from enemy goat-getters rolled off his thick hide like BBshot off an elephant. He turned casually and grinned at Cord, squirted a brown stream of tobacco juice into the dust.

"Good sign, kid," he drawled. "They musta seen the way you clouted that onion in practice. They don't get on a guy less'n they figure he's dangerous."

Cord smacked his fist into his glove and moved his feet.

"Make 'em hit to me," he said automatically.

But he didn't feel the confidence that his words strove to imply.

Big Pete had his stuff that day. He poured his fireball through there, nicked the edges, and when the hitters got set to tee off on the swift, the cagy veteran mixed in curves and off-pace heaves. He got the leadoff man on an easy roller to Rigado, struck out the second hitter, and induced the third to loft a cent-a-million sky-rider to Babe White.

Falcon maces were equally impotent in their half of the inning. Three up and three down and Cord trotted out to his slot at second. Enemy jockies opened up with both barrels again.

"Punch it through the box," Carrot Malone yelled from the third base coaching box. "Torpedo this guy—but quick!"

"Any roller through the right side is a ticket for two," a bench rider shouted.

The rugged line of Cord's jaw set and he vowed inwardly that he wouldn't let the rawhiding get him down. Maybe it was due to the superb control Pete Clemons had that day, and the savvy he showed in keeping his pitches where they were hardest to place; maybe it was just that the fates decided Cord deserved a break. Whatever it was, for six innings Evader hitters did not steer a ground ball toward his side of the infield.

"All right, it's time we did something about this chucker," Dan Harn said when the Falcons came in for the bottom of the sixth. "Five frames is about his length

for the kind of pitching he's put out. Make him go all the way, Slatz."

Slatz Kittz nodded, pulled a long bat from the rack.

"My wait-'im-out-and-foul-'em-off stick," he agreed. "I'll work him to a frazzle."

The lanky firstsacker took his stance in the back of the box, inches farther from the rubber than usual. He proceeded to make good his promise. He had a good eye and he worked a two-and-nothing count, took a strike, refused to sucker for a tantalizing bender just off the outside edge. Then he fouled off a pitch too close to the inside corner to take. He fouled another. And another. He fouled off six straight pitches. Finally the Evader hurler slipped a mite on his control and busted through a fast one that was high and outside.

Slatz Kittz tossed his bat toward the dugout, grinned and ambled to first on the game's first walk and the Falcon dugout came abruptly alive.

"Here we go, here we go! The balloon is just ascending!"

"Pick out that ole gopher ball! Go fer all the bases!"

Dan Harn said to Madill, "The old army game, Mike."

Madill took a high hard one with his bat drawn back as though hitting away. The Evader thirdbaseman and firstsacker had charged in, anticipating a bunt, but they edged a little deeper when they saw that Madill hadn't shortened his grip on the bat.

THE Falcon hot corner guardian crossed them beautifully on the next pitch. He laid a twisting roller down the third-base line. The pitcher tore over, scooped up the pellet in his bare hand, saw that he had no chance to force Kittz at second and burned a strike to first. But the ump's hairline decision was in favor of Madill.

Kittz was in a spot where any clean hit would score him and with Blacky Carroll coming up and reliable Babe White on deck, it looked like a big inning for the Falcons. Cord Wallace was in the hole.

Blacky Carroll went up there and slapped the first ball pitched squarely on the seams. The rocket shot over the thirdbaseman's head and looked like a sure

double. But the Evader leftfielder had been playing Carroll just right. He raced over and snagged that drive five feet inside the foul line and his bullet throw to second made Slatz Kittz hit the dirt to get back safely.

Babe White touched his cap to acknowledge the roar from Falcon fans, settled in the batter's box. He and the Evader pitcher dueled; the count went to the familiar three-and-two.

That Evader chucker had plenty of pitching guts. He came in there with a sharp breaking pug-handle on the pay ball, and Babe White miss-timed it. The ball skittered off his bat to the left of the mound, just out of reach of the pitcher, not hard enough hit for the shortstop to grab it in time to make a play at second. His snap throw nipped White at first.

Two gone, now; two men in scoring position still.

"Nothing to worry about!" Carrot Malone bellowed from the Evader dugout. "Easy meat coming up!"

Other ribald comments came from the Evader bench. Babe White strolled leisurely in front of the plate on his way back to the bench. He held Cord's gaze steadily.

"Best coin to pay off a bunch of flannel-mouths is something they understand," White said. "Bust one, kid. Ram it down their throats!"

Cord's knuckles whitened as his big hands gripped the bat. Then he forced himself to relax. Just meet the ball, that was the thing. He didn't have to knock it out of the lot.

He looked over the first pitch and it was a hair too low. The next one brushed the outside edge. Then that third one came up there and it looked big as a basketball all the way. Cord met it on the button. A white streak screamed over short, the ball hit between the gardeners in one long bound and shot to the concrete facing of the left center stands.

Kittz and Madill dented the plate for two big markers and the Evaders didn't make a play on Cord Wallace. Cord stood on second and laughed toward the Evader dugout. Try *that* on your base viols, he thought!

Cord whacked a big hand into his glove and grinned at Pete Clemons as the veteran

chucker tossed the resin bag back of the mound. Cord felt good. That two-ply smash in the clutch had been a real, lusty wallop, nothing scratchy about it. Maybe that would put a damper on the riding.

"Make 'em hit to me," Cord yelled.

This time the youngster owned all the confidence his shout implied.

Big Pete may have unconsciously eased up a little with the two run working margin. He got in a three-and-one hole on the hitter and the Evader at the dish was set for the cripple. It wasn't too much of a cripple at that, one of Big Pete's fireballs down the outside edge, but the crack of the bat testified to a full hit ball.

The pellet skimmed to the right of Big Pete, plenty hot and twisting, taking the English from the hitter's late cut. Cord moved over fast. He was in front of the drive, bent over to grab the ball in his big hands, when Lady Luck switched off her smile.

The horsehide hit a clump of sod that someone's spikes had gouged from the edge of the basepath.

The crazy little hop the clump gave the sphere made it jump just enough to skip over Cord's frantic grab and ricochet off his wrist. The ball trickled across the grass into short rightfield.

Cord leaped after it. He was conscious of the Evader coach at firstbase waving the runner on. Cord pounced on the ball, whirled and threw in the same motion—and the peg was three feet beyond the kangaroo leap of Rigado, covering the bag. The runner slid into second but was up in nothing flat as he saw the wild throw. He tore for third and was standing on the bag, dusting himself off before Mike Madill got the relay from leftfield.

Now the anvil chorus really cut loose from the Evaders.

"Poke it through second! Poke it through second!" Carrot Malone cupped his hands in the thirdbase coaching box and yelled ostensibly at the batter but directed at Cord Wallace. "Get on first and you're as good as on third! I told you! I told you!"

"Here we go! Here we go! Sock that apple through the middle!"

Ribald comment poured from the Evaders. One of them jumped out of the dugout, yelled something at Cord about

sea legs and did a burlesque of a hornpipe. The umpire at thirdbase shook his head, started toward the Evader bench and the burlesquer ducked back into the dugout. But the umpires couldn't save Cord all of it. Salty cracks continued to flow from the Evaders, with no names named but no doubt left as to who was on the pan.

Pete Clemons turned and grinned at Cord.

"Don't mind it, kid," the big pitcher said. "Bad hops happen to any of us."

CORD kicked the dirt, disgusted. Sure, it had been a bad hop; but a guy in the big show had to handle the tough ones.

Big Pete worked carefully on the next hitter. Maybe too carefully. The umps gave the mace wielder the decision on a three and two pitch that was awful close either way.

Runners on first and third, now, and no one gone. The Evaders were out to the lip of their dugout, pounding bats, pouring out the rawhiding.

Big Pete Clemons hitched his pants, rolled his cud of eating tobacco to his other jaw. Dan Harn signalled the infield to play in to cut off the run at the plate. Dan had confidence in his big pitcher to feed the hitters stuff that they would beat into the ground.

"Bust that old dipsy-do at 'em," Slatz Kittz yelled.

Cord Wallace moved restlessly in his position. He said nothing. He felt keenly that Big Pete wouldn't be in this tough spot if he had grabbed that roller. Big Pete cut loose his downer and the ball had plenty of stuff on it.

The hitter swung and the ball spun into the dust just beyond that batter's box, skittered in one lazy hop toward short. Amato Rigado jumped, scooped, flicked a lightning glance at the man coming from third and ruled that he couldn't get him. Maybe he could have, maybe it was wiser that he didn't try. But the second's fraction that Rigado took to look cost any chance for the double play at second. Cord Wallace raced for the sack, took the whip from Rigado in his gloved hand as he kicked the bag, pivoted and busted a wrist-snap peg to Kittz. The lanky firstsacker stretched as far toward the ball as he could, but the runners spikes beat dust from the



Rigado eyed Cord, said coldly, "A man's got bottom, he fights his own battle."

bag an instant before the ball smacked into Kitzz' glove.

Cord Wallace was flying through the air a split second after the horseshoe left his hand. The Evader runner from first had barged in, doing all he could to break up the double play, and that was baseball. But it wasn't baseball the way he gave Cord the hip.

"Keep outta the baseline," the Evader growled. "The runner's entitled to that."

Quick rage welled in Cord. Instinctively his fist balled and he scrambled up and lunged at the Evader baserunner. The Evader was walking off, dusting his pants, back turned. Cord couldn't hit him without whirling him around and in the instant that he reached for the guy's shoulder it popped into Cord's head that was just the thing they wanted. They'd think the riding was getting him and pour it on more than ever. Besides, Cord knew that it hadn't been the spill that spoiled the double play. He just hadn't been fast enough on the pivot.

The Evader must have sensed that he was on the verge of getting belted. He turned and at sight of the blue fire of Cord's eyes, the baserunner involuntarily ducked to the side.

"Take it easy, guy," he muttered. "You got no call to get too riled." He flicked

a quick look at Rigado. "Even your own teammate ain't siding you, you'll notice!"

Rigado eyed Cord, said coldly, "A man's got bottom, he fights his own battles." Then Rigado muttered so only Cord could hear, "There's no place in big league ball for a guy that musses up a play because he lacks what it takes—and then tries to make it look good putting on a tough front!"

"It's a cinch!" Carrots Malone chortled from back of third. "Keep 'em rolling down toward that old keystone spot! On first's as good as on third!"

The Evaders were palpably playing to crack the rookie. On the first pitch, the runner on first broke for second. Cord wasted a precious second glancing toward Rigado, was a step slow in starting for the bag. Rigado took the catcher's peg—a fraction late. The umps spread his palms. Now the Evaders had the tying run in scoring position.

"The guy was a right-hand hitter," Rigado snarled. "You ever hear that a secondbaseman covers when there's a right-hand hitter up!"

Cord stared at his one-time friend. Rigado knew better than that. In the big-time the hitters would have a field day with the hit-and-run if they could always depend on knowing who was covering the

keystone sack on steal attempts. Cord knew that it was a matter of signals between the shortstop and the second sacker. He had seen no signal on that play. He'd been caught flatfooted, he admitted, but he suspected that Rigado was in the same boat. The thing that hurt most was the way Big Pete Clemons looked around after he took the ball from Rigado. Big Pete just eyed Cord steadily and there was a question in the hurler's eyes.

"Here we go!" Carrot Malone bellowed. "We've got a million like that! A *million!*"

Clemons didn't give the hitter anything too fat. It was a spot where the big chucker would just as soon hand out a free ticket to first. It wasn't exactly an intentional walk, but the Evader sticker was waved down to first by the ump on an inside pitch a shade too far inside.

"Get the two!" Slatz Kittz yelled. "Nothing to worry about, Pete!"

Automatically Cord noted that another right-hand hitter was at the plate. He glanced at Rigado. Rigado made no sign. Cord edged a little toward second. They wouldn't pull a double steal with one gone, but he was going to be there to cover in case—.

As Pete Clemons rocked into his windup, Cord saw from the corner of his vision that the man on first was cutting for second. Cord jumped toward the bag, saw that the baserunner there was tearing for third. It *was* a double steal. Well, he was there to cover second if the throw came down—then abruptly it wasn't a double steal.

The batter had shifted his stance, choked his bat. As the ball came across the plate, he slashed at the horsehide in a half-swing, half-poke. It wasn't a sizzling drive but it was perfectly placed, skittering across the grass right through the spot where Cord Wallace should have been. Cord socked his spikes into the ground, tried desperately to reverse and reach the ball. The sphere trickled almost lazily past his sprawling leap into short rightfield.

Ben Reft raced stocky legs in from his spot in deep right but the ball had stopped dead before Reft reached it. He didn't even make a throw, it was no use. Two runs had scored on that smartly placed hit and the batter stood on second giving Cord the horse laugh.

"My gorry," Ben Reft growled. "Didn't you ever hear of place hitting, Wallace! That guy is one of the best in the league. Any sandlotter oughta know better'n to commit himself too soon in a spot like that!"

The Evaders didn't score again, but they didn't need to. They stuck a southpaw in the box for the last three frames and the fork-hander turned back Falcon mace wielders without threat of a run. It was 3-2 for the Evaders on the scoreboard when their center gardener went to the wall and dragged down Babe White's drive for the final out.

Going through the dugout someone said disgustedly, "And that's the bird Harn's been saying would plug up the gap at second! Huh! For my dough, Rigado's got the angle on this setup!"

III

CORD noticed that Rigado wasn't hurrying, going into the dugout tunnel and he had the feeling that the stocky shortstop was delaying for the same reason he was. That suited Cord fine. There had to be a showdown between him and Rigado, and the sooner the quicker. Cord looked hurriedly over his shoulder. No one else was in sight.

"Rigado!" Cord called. Rigado stopped, turned. Cord said, "You've thrown around insinuations about me, you sicked Carrot Malone on me, Rigado."

"And if I did?" Rigado didn't deny Cord's charge. "And if I insinuated that you're gutless?"

Rigado's black eyes glittered. Cord said, "You hate me. Okay. You messed me up on a play that was up to you to do the calling, you know the hitters. In *my* league we don't call a guy that lets down the whole gang to satisfy a personal grudge exactly full of courage, if you want to put things on a guts or no guts basis!"

Rigado flushed. His hands clenched and the muscles of his powerful forearms worked. The only thing that kept fists from flying right there was the appearance of Dan Harn at the bend of the tunnel. Harn's eyes bored into Rigado and then into Cord. The manager was no one's fool, he knew what was going on. But he didn't rail at them.

"I was looking for you, lad," he said to Cord. "Joyce Clayton is waiting in my office." Again Dan's gaze probed the belligerent players. He chose to speak to Cord.

"Take it easy, lad," Harn said. "You'll get going. You'll be all right after"—the manager's sharp eyes bit into Rigado then—"you and Rigado work together for a while. Oh, by the way, both of you. There will be no fighting in the clubhouse, the dugout, or on the field. Now or later. And I'm paid to do whatever bawling out is necessary. That clear?"

Rigado's black eyes flashed and for just an instant open rebellion was in his expression. Then he shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"Everything is sweetness and light, huh!" he said tightly. "Okay, Harn, I'll put out for the club—but let's all know where we stand. Your fair-haired lad won't last up here. Nobody's going to carry him!"

Dan Harn eyed the stocky shortstop for a space and the line of the manager's mouth was grim. Then he turned and repeated to Cord, "Joyce Clayton is waiting in my office, lad."

Cord was in no mood to talk to the girl. He didn't want to see her. He didn't want to see anybody. He wished that the manager hadn't come along. Nothing was settled.

"I absolutely am not putting out anything for a radio program," he said. "I don't want to talk to her or anyone else about—about—well, just tell her that I positively refuse to consider any proposition she has to make!"

But Joyce Clayton was waiting outside the clubhouse door when Cord came from the dressing room. She didn't beat around the bush.

"You've no right to refuse to consider my request, Mr. Wallace," she said.

"Now, look," Cord said. "I owe you something for acting like a surly hothead this morning. I apologize. That is all, Miss Clayton."

The girl eyed him calmly. "You are mistaken," she said casually. "Today Dramatized is going to put your story on the air, Mr. Wallace."

"That's what you think!"

"That's what I know," she said. "Why

don't you look at this sensibly? You're in the limelight, people are interested in you. Not only as the prospective answer to one of the Falcon problems but as an individual personality. They want to know about you. You owe it to—to—well, to your public to give."

"I don't owe anything to anybody," Cord said savagely. He didn't want to lose his temper again with this girl, but there were limits. "I don't consider that I'm under any obligation to live in a goldfish bowl! I'm out of the Navy, through with the war. I refuse to be put in a false position of hero business. Believe me, Miss Clayton, that is final!"

"Perhaps you are—ashamed of your story," she said in low tone.

Cord jerked as though she had slapped him and for an instant he wished that she wasn't a girl.

"Thanks," he said grimly. "It has *not* been nice meeting you, Miss Clayton—and I will *not* be seeing you again!"

He stepped around the girl and stalked down the street.

THE Falcons had the final of a two-game set against the Evaders today then a short swing around other cities in their half of the league. Three games in the city of the Savages, three in the home ballyard of the Blue Sox and a pair against the Evaders in their bandbox park and they would return home for a long stretch in Falcon Stadium. A freakish break in the schedule brought the Evaders back to start a home stand in which every club in the circuit would visit the storm-tossed Falcons.

Dan Harn called his men together in the clubhouse before the second Evader game.

"We've been building since the season started," Harn said. "Now I think the building process is over. We're tied for the bottom berth in the first division, but we're only six full games out of first place."

"We can take this thing. I feel it. Now is the time to start piling up games in the win column. Every man has a stake in whether we roll or bog down."

The manager's probing eyes stabbed at Rigado and Cord and around the group. "We're shooting with Buck on the rub-

ber today," Harn finished. "I want this game. All right, let's go."

Cord didn't know quite what to expect from Rigado. The stocky shortfielder didn't say a word, didn't even look at Cord. But in the pre-game infield workout, Rigado laid his pegs and tosses right in the groove on double-play tries. Okay, Cord thought, as long as you do that. He'd read that Joe Tinker and Johnny Evers played side by side in the old Chicago Cub infield without speaking, feuding constantly. And there had never been a greater keystone pair than those two. If they could do it, he and Rigado could.

Bill Buck was not the husky, power pitcher that Pete Clemons was. Buck was on the slender side, not rugged enough to stand up under nine innings of fogging fireballs through there. But his long right arm was a whiplash, carried plenty of the old swift when he needed it, and he was smart and had a good jug-handle to work in with his slider.

But every chucker has days when his stuff is just enough off that the hitters get on him. This was one of those days for Bill Buck. Evader sluggers teed off on Buck from the first pitch. A solid drive to the screen in right for a double, a hard hit sizzler over third base that Mike Madill couldn't reach and the Evaders had a run. Slatz Kittz knocked down another potential double down the first base line and beat the runner to the bag for one out. Then another clean base knock to left center scored a second Evader marker.

They had a chance to end the inning with no further damage when Rigado cut far to his right and came up with a sharp grounder. He breezed the rocket to second and Cord Wallace was there. The runner from first roared down on him. Cord had the man by five steps but the big Evader hurled himself at Cord like a blocking back throwing a block. Cord got the ball away fast, sidestepped and let the guy sprawl on his face.

"Okay, monkey," Cord said. "Laugh that off!"

And in a second the Evader was laughing. He stood on the bag and dusted himself off and pointed to the umpire. The arbiter had his hands spread parallel to the ground.

"Safe," the Evader said. "You hurried

so much to avoid being mowed down that you missed the sack!"

That's the way it was. Cord stormed protest but you don't change an ump's decision. The Evaders scored two more counters before the inning ended.

In the dugout somebody muttered softly, "So we're through building, huh! Looks to me like there's plenty of building left to do—from the *bottom* up!"

Dan Harn tried to give them the pepper. "Four runs won't win this gall game," the manager said. "This Evader chucker's always been a 'cousin' for us. Everybody hits."

It looked as though Harn had the dope when the first two Falcon stickers notched clean base blows. Then two infield outs on which runners couldn't advance. Babe White cleaned the ducks off the pond with a terrific drive to the center field stands and it was 4-2. Cord stepped into the rectangle, grimly determined.

He took one that was too close. The second pitch was in there and his thick wrists whipcracked the bat around. The ball was between the third baseman and the bag, a foot off the ground and traveling like a rifle shot. It landed a foot inside the foul line and rolled to the left field corner. White trotted across with the third Falcon marker, and Cord drew up at second.

Some of the uneasiness in him lifted. He'd got back one of the runs he'd cost his team, and there were eight more innings. He'd show these guys.

Carrot Malone passed Cord a minute later as the teams changed sides. The beefy-faced redhead sneered, "A guy can maybe tag one once in a while and still not have it! Keep out of our way, Wallace, we'll clip you!"

That game developed into a nightmare for the pitchers of both teams. It was one of those cockeyed days when everything and anything tossed up there by the chuckers rattles off the ash of the stickers.

THE Evaders shelled Bill Buck off the hill in the third with three solid hits, a base on balls, an error by Rigado on a drive over second and a pair of long fly balls to the outfield. Four more runs went on the board for them.

Rigado growled in the dugout. "They

give a guy an error for trying to get a drive outa his territory! Nuts, that's why they have two guys in the middle of the diamond!"

The Falcons knocked the Evader starter off the rubber in their half. Cord got a second hit, a sharp single that pushed two runs around, but no one had any praise for him. The two clubs kept battling away, but always the Evaders had a run or two margin.

It was 11-9 for the Evaders going into the eighth. The first guy up for them doubled to left, slid into second with spikes riding high. There was no play on him and Cord watched him calmly from ten feet away.

"To bad it wasn't close," the Evader said.

Cord made no answer. He was aware that Rigado was eying him. Cord had nothing to do with the two runs the Evaders counted that inning.

But in the bottom of the ninth, with the Falcons trailing by four runs, Cord had plenty to do with the game winning rally Harn's team put on.

Harn sent a pinch hitter to the plate for the pitcher and he came through with a scratch single. Rigado waited the pitcher out, got a walk. Slatz Kitzz advanced both men on a long drive to right which the Evader gardener dragged down after a long run. Mike Madill topped a swinging bunt that the fielder grabbed, but Mike was safe when the runner on third jockied long enough to delay the pitcher's throw.

Falcon fans came alive, roared as Blacky Carrol swaggered to the plate. Babe White was on deck and it looked like a big rally with the two sluggers hitting one-two and the bases loaded.

Blacky Carroll hit one squarely on the nose with all his power back of it—and it bee-lined straight for the leftfielder. One run scored but now there were two out. The fans continued their clamor. Babe White would come through. The Babe was a tough cookie up there in the clutch.

Babe White was extremely lucky that he didn't end the inning and the game. The pitcher crossed him with a sharp-breaking curve on a two-and-two heave. The ball caromed off the very end of White's bat, rolled lazily down the first base line. And the Evader first baseman overran the ball,

fumbled, grabbed frantically, dropped it and threw too late to the plate to get Rigado. Slatz Kitzz scrambled safely back to third and Cord Wallace stepped into the hitter's rectangle.

It was a spot for an intentional walk, but a manager hesitates to put the winning run on base. Carrot Malone came out of the Evader dugout as the Evader manager and the hurler were conferring.

"Don't walk this guy, boss," Malone said loudly. "It's a cinch. Some birds have the habit of folding when the chips are down."

The Evader manager probably was thinking of the two hits Cord had already clouted, but he went along with Malone. The pitcher showed when he busted a fast one down there on the first heave that he was pitching to Cord.

Cord watched the next pitch narrowly. It was speeding down the outside edge. Cord flexed his muscles, stepped into the ball and cracked it fair. He hit it right where it was pitched. The sphere was a white streak five yards inside the right field line.

Kitzz and Madill scored on that two-ply swat and a fierce take-that-you-mugs feeling coursed in Cord. Ben Reft rapped a clean blow between the outfielders and Cord raced around to the plate.

The only word of appreciation he got came from Dan Harn.

"Nice hit, that double," the manager said. "You're in the groove, lad. Don't mind anything that happened today, keep thinking that you're hitting that ball. The rest will come in time. You and Rigado will be the smoothest combination in the league, after you work together a while.

Cord said nothing. But he knew Dan Harn was wrong. He and Rigado would never work smoothly together. And the silence of other players told him that they all held the same opinion of him as Rigado.

THAT night Cord sat in his room gloomily reading the sport-sheets. The radio was going and he was half-listening to the background of music while he read. The columnists had little to say anent Cord Wallace and he felt vaguely that the very absence of comment from the diamond gossipers was an implication

that he was not living up to expectations.

He threw down the papers irritably. Blast it, he wasn't living up to anything. Sure, he'd got three hits in ten times at bat so far and a .300 clip at the plate is good hitting. He'd had an error charged against him in the opening game, had handled four chances today without being charged with a misplay. But that wasn't the whole story. A second base duo that doesn't notch the twin killing is definitely not big league. He and Rigado were not—

The music stopped and a voice came from the radio. Cord reached for the dials. He wanted to listen to no know-it-all commentator fatuously oracular on world affairs. Something about the voice coming from the radio made him hold off changing the dial. Even before she spoke her name, Cord recognized the voice of Joyce Clayton.

"—Your Today Dramatized reporter," she went on. "We had hoped to be able to bring you tonight the story of a man who has returned from service aboard a ship in the United States Maritime Service. Circumstances beyond our control—which is to say that the personality we had planned to present refused permission to use his story—make it impossible to bring you the proposed dramatization and we are forced to confess that our schedule is thrown off to the extent that we must more or less extemporize.

"Thereby hangs a problem. We hope that the topics we have chosen may strike responsive chords in our listening audience."

There followed comments about various and sundry matters of the city. Then abruptly Cord sat straighter in his chair and gave the radio all his attention.

"And now we come to a topic close to the hearts of sports lovers: what is wrong with the Falcons? Manager Dan Harn frankly stated at the beginning of the season that his club was a question mark. Given adequate performance in key spots, the Falcons could be a pennant threat. More than adequate performance has been forthcoming in the shaky positions with one exception—second base.

"It is an old axiom among baseball men that a team cannot win consistently without strength down the middle. To the initiated that means catching, pitching, and

fielding strength around second base and in center field. The Falcons are lacking in but one cog for this 'must' strength, but one cog can cause a whole machine not to function.

"Decidedly the quality of play at the vital keystone spot has not been up to par. We respect Manager Harn's judgment of playing talent, and we hate to say it because Dan Harn brought the present incumbent to the Falcons, but the play of Cord Wallace has not measured up to standard. Perhaps we are wrong—we hope we are—but this reporter believes that the Rigado-Wallace combination at second base will not function in the manner necessary for a pennant contending team.

"It is too bad that Wallace does not—"

Cord angrily snapped the switch of the radio. He was seething inside. Strength down the middle! Play of Cord Wallace has not measured up to standard! Where did this wise-acre of a dame get off, airing her erudition? Who did she think she was?

He suddenly looked at his watch, saw that the Today Dramatized program had ten minutes yet to run. WTZO studios were not far from the hotel, with any luck he could get there before Miss Joyce Clayton left. He bounded from his chair and hurried from the room.

IV

THE girl at the desk in the studio reception room sized up Cord as he stalked angrily into the place. She gave him a swift once-over, flashed a doubtful smile. Cord scowled.

"Where will I find this Today Dramatized program being put on the air," he demanded.

"The program is just closing," she said. "Whom did you wish to see?"

"The high-and-mighty head poo-bah herself!"

"And the nature of your business?"

Cord's scowl deepened. "Personal," he grunted.

The loudspeaker in the room gave forth the information just then that Today Dramatized would be heard again tomorrow at the same time and a different voice went into a commercial. The reception-

ist said doubtfully, "Miss Clayton usually confers with the program director immediately following the show. I'll try to contact her."

She spoke over an inter-office phone and evidently was connected with Joyce Clayton. She glanced up at Cord, said, "Your name?" She repeated it into the phone: Then: "Right, Miss Clayton. In the lounge. Thank you."

She smiled at Cord again, said, "Miss Clayton will be free in fifteen minutes. She will see you in the room across the hall from Studio B. It's the third door on the left down the south corridor."

Cord opened the third door down the south corridor. As he entered, a stocky man in a big leather chair opposite the door looked up from a magazine. Cord Wallace and Amato Rigado stared at each other, seemingly struck momentarily dumb.

"Well!" Rigado broke the spell. "What are you doing here!"

A jumble of things tumbled through Cord's mind in kaleidoscopic pattern. He thought he saw now how it was that Joyce Clayton had panned him on the air. The old quick rage welled in him.

"Maybe I came to see about getting my side of the failure of the Wallace-Rigado combination put on the air," he bit out tightly.

Rigado was naturally swarthy of complexion and in the instant that he jerked sharp gaze to Cord, his face darkened still more. Beetling brows as black as his sleek hair drew together and his dark eyes threw out sparks. He laid aside the magazine, stood up. He was a full head shorter than Cord's six-one but he probably packed ten pounds more weight in his compact bulk. Rigado's thick shoulders bunched slightly.

"Maybe you'd like to make that crack clear, Wallace!"

"I heard the program that just finished," Cord said. "I think you know what I mean!"

Rigado's dark gaze raked Cord deliberately.

"I never did like baby-blue-eyed and corn-silk haired guys," he said. "I'd hate you if you were the kind of looking guy I ought to like. But get this, Wallace: I don't ask anyone else to tell off any mug I don't go for."

He hesitated a space, seemed waiting for Cord to say something, then went on.

"Maybe what's really in your nut is to cry around with the give-a-guy-a-break whine. Maybe you figure you can play the heavy sympathy act. Not from me, Wallace! Nor from anybody else that knows the score!"

"You dragged my kid brother away to war with you and you came back and he didn't. You were the officer in charge of the gun crews on the merchantman; you gave the commands—and you were the only Navy guy to get to a lifeboat when the ship was torpedoed! A guy with guts wouldn't have been in that smelly position, Wallace!"

Rigado's words dripped scorn as they bit into Cord. His big hands balled even as Cord's own clenched into fists. A blind urge to smash the cold sneer mirrored in Rigado's face gripped Cord but a tight something in the pit of his stomach held him back. There the thing was, right out in the open—and Cord was helpless to do anything about it.

He wasn't sure that the thing Rigado put bluntly into words wasn't true!

"I tried to save Tony, I tell you." Cord groaned, more to the gnawing doubt inside him than to Rigado. "Tony wasn't just one of my crew. We were buddies. We went through boot training together. We took the examination for midshipman school together, it was just that Tony hadn't enough math background to make the grade for a commission. But that never made any difference. I tried to save Tony. We were together when the ship went down and—and—"

That was the trouble; the thing that had tortured him all these months. Cord had no clear recollection of what happened after that final upheaving explosion that literally blew Tony Rigado and him into the water. They'd told him in the hospital afterward that it had been a direct hit on their forward gun position from a shell of the surfaced submarine.

"The next thing I was conscious of was being in the lifeboat, hours after the ship had gone down." Cord scarcely realized that he was saying his thoughts aloud. He'd been over and over this so many times, tried so desperately to honestly *know*. Moisture came out on his forehead

now as he went on. "I wasn't even sure that the crumpled huddle in the bow of the boat that was Tony was alive. Everything was a blur of pain and thirst and sweating physical agony while the sub that had torpedoed us rode the swell a half mile away.

"The Jap pigboat played us as a duck hunter manipulates his decoys outside the blind. One of their favorite tactics was to lurk near the scene of a torpedoing, hoping that some other lone ship had picked up the S.O.S. and they could pick them off when they came to the rescue."

Cord would never forget those long hours. Pictures flashed now in his brain. The Jap commander had amused himself through the long hours by leisurely machine-gunning the lifeboat as it drifted close enough. They hadn't even a side arm aboard to answer back. The Jap had machine-gunned them until merciful darkness blotted the South Pacific.

THE hours of that interminable night, the moans of the wounded, the confusion of sighting and desperately trying to attract the attention of the destroyer in the gray dawn, remained a muddle in Cord's mind. He had a foggy remembrance of saluting a Lieutenant Commander aboard the destroyer, mumbling something entirely unintelligible, and pitching to the deck, completely out.

His first thought when he came to clear consciousness in sick bay on shore had been of Tony. They told him that ten days had passed, tried to evade his questions. Finally they'd had to tell him that two Navy men and four members of the ship's crew were dead when they took them from the lifeboat.

"Harragh!" Amato Rigado made a noise in his throat that was half snort, half snarl. "I didn't think you could give even a ghot of an explanation. "I don't want any part of you! In my book, you haven't got what it takes—to play big league ball or anything else that requires a man! You—"

The red rage in Cord broke bounds. His fist shot out, straight for Rigado's hard-lined mouth. But the stocky shortstop wasn't off guard. He jerked his head aside and Cord's blow barely grazed him. An eager light leaped into his dark eyes as

Rigado jumped forward. He plowed a hard fist at Cord's jaw. Cord blocked the full force of the blow with his forearm but it jarred him. He drew in a breath and a fierce almost joyous release swept him.

He pumped both fists to Rigado's head and with each crunching blow he felt the tightness loosening in him. He was aware that Rigado was landing sledge-hammer wallops, but Cord felt only the shock of them, no pain. Then suddenly a sharp voice beat at his ears. Small but surprisingly strong hands tugged at him.

"Stop it, you crazy fools! Stop brawling like a pair of silly school kids!"

Amato Rigado must have felt the same reluctance to continue throwing punches with Joyce Clayton tugging and pushing at the two of them. He was breathing hard as was Cord when the red-haired girl managed to shove them apart. She eyed them both and her eyes were stormy. The thin line of her brow arched high.

"A beautiful little scene!" she said scornfully. "Something for both of you to be proud of!"

She glared at Cord and then at Rigado.

"The men who can make or break Dan Harn's ball club," she said coldly. "Putting on a sandlot battle over a thing you both know has to be settled in a more permanent way than with fists! No wonder the Falcon defense around second base has fallen apart!"

Rigado gave that curious snort again, said, "Nuts! Where do you get that 'around second base' stuff! I've always held up my end and I always will! Suppose you keep out of what doesn't concern you. What's the idea, phoning me to come up here to meet this—this—"

"I didn't expect Mr. Wallace," Joyce Clayton cut in on whatever Rigado was going to call Cord. "But I'm glad you're both here."

Again she eyed both men and when she spoke again her tone was different.

"I'm glad you came up here, Mr. Wallace. The purpose of that program—and the purpose of my phoning you, Mr. Rigado—is the same. I—I've got personal reasons for wanting you two to get together. You've got to get together! And I can promise you that you'd better do it quickly—or the story I overheard will

be put on the air and not complimentary to either the Rigado or Wallace side!"

She stopped, looked at Cord Wallace and reached for her handbag on the table.

"I've got something you should read over very carefully, Mr. Wallace," she said. "You will change your mind about—"

"I'll change my mind about nothing!" Cord cut in. She had a nerve, figuring that she could threaten him, force him to sign a paper giving her the right to use his story on the air. "I've told you where I stand and nothing you can do will change it!"

He glared at Joyce Clayton, then at Rigado.

"I get it," he said grimly. "You've teamed up. Well, it didn't work, and it never will. Chew that over together!"

Cord turned toward the door. He heard Rigado growl, "Nuts! Miss Clayton, hire yourself a hall. I don't want any part of either one of you!"

DAN HARN stopped Cord before the Falcons took the field in that first game against the Savages.

"These Savages will be playing you today, lad," Harn said. "The grapevine travels fast in the big league. Watch yourself."

Cord shrugged, "Okay," he said soberly. He didn't fear them. "I'll be on my guard."

In the very first inning the Savages let him know that they had got the grapevine word. With a man on first and one gone, the hitter drove a grounder to Rigado near the bag. Rigado scooped it up, tossed the ball waist high to Cord and Cord buzzed the rocket to Kitzz for the double play. It wasn't even close at second but the runner dove at Cord. He hit nothing but atmosphere because Cord had jumped aside.

"Chicken!" growled the Savage. "You'd better duck, fella! We'll cut you down!"

"Anytime." Cord said calmly. "Start cutting. Maybe two can play at that game!"

He saw Rigado's sharp look but the stocky shortfielder had turned away when Cord glanced his way.

Falcon war clubs started cannonading early that day. They piled up a seven run lead by the fifth frame and they coasted to

a 7-4 win. Cord had two-for-four at the plate and one of his blows drove in a pair of markers.

They went on to sweep the Savage series and a thing happened in the final game that made Cord wonder. He saw Babe White stop one of the Savage outfielders between innings, saw White's jaw wagging under the other's chin. The guy was the one who had essayed to cut Cord down the first game, and had barged into him again today. The next inning the same guy got on first, was forced out at second for the final out. He didn't make any effort to barge into Cord. Cord looked at him curiously.

"You reform, all of a sudden?" Cord asked. "Or did you maybe figure I meant it when I told you two could play at that game?"

The Savage scowled. "Listen, bud," he growled. "You ain't kidding anybody. The whole league's got the angle on you. But it happens I've tangled with Babe White before. When the Babe gives me the offer to lay off—or settle with him personally—I'm layin' off!"

Cord pondered the thing for two days. He didn't know whether he liked it or not. It was okay to know that one of his mates was for him, but Cord wanted no part of any hint that others had to fight his battles for him.

The Falcons lost the first two games to the Blue Sox. In both games there were plays at second where Blue Sox players deliberately rode into Cord. The going was rough, but Cord found himself rather enjoying the stuff. He jammed out an elbow on one melee and caught a Blue Sox in the Adam's apple. The guy turned purple, trying to swallow. Cord heard him mutter as he turned away and he thought the Blue Sox said, "Whoever said that guy was custard? Something's screwy!"

Cord got the game-winning hit in the final Blue Sox series that kept the Falcons from dropping the set. And it was in the clubhouse after that game that things started to come to a head. For no particular reason, Cord said to Babe White, "I found out you told off one of the guys working me over the other day. Want you to know I appreciate it."

The veteran outfielder eyed the rookie

a long moment. Then White sort of snorted.

"Yeah," he grunted. "And by gorry, I'm about ready to tell off some more guys—right here on our own club." The Babe spoke loud enough that everyone in the room could hear. "In my book, when a guy takes the gaff and hangs in there and comes through with base knocks that win games, he deserves a break!"

Amato Rigado straightened from stooping to take off his spikes. He stood up.

"That is aimed at me, I suppose."

"It's aimed at anybody that needs it," White said. "Blast it, the Falcons have always been a club that fought together. It gripes me to see the bruisers on other clubs kicking one of us around and we all take it. Personal feelings aside, we're all trying for a slice of the extra dough a winner gets. Any guy that's doing his share to earn that dough, I'm for—and there's others could do things along the line of helping the club!"

Rigado shot a glare at Cord. "I'll do my share to help the club—up to a point," Rigado said evenly. "But things that have happened can't be erased by a few base hits. A man's got it or he hasn't. Nothing has happened to make me see things any different."

Everybody knew what Rigado was talking about. Eyes swerved to Cord. The blond rookie knew that this was the spot for action.

"There is an alley across the street," Cord said evenly. "That would be off the bounds Dan set, Rigado. Maybe there's the place to discuss whether I'm gutless or not!"

Rigado stared at Cord and a flicker crossed the back of the stocky man's eyes. Then he grinned tightly, said, "And there's no better time than now!"

"Hold it!"

The words came from the door of the little coop in the corner that was the manager's dressing quarters. Dan Harn stepped out.

"I played ball ten years before I began managing," Dan said. "I know there are situations where there is nothing but a fist clash will settle the air. Maybe this is one, I don't know. In ordinary times, I'd be the first to send you two squareheaded fools at one another.

"But there is a little matter of a player shortage, have any of you heard? I'm not risking having one—maybe two—men bang themselves up so they can't play ball. Anybody, *anybody*! that puts on a battle until after the season is closed—anywhere—can figure they're out five hundred dollars! Let me make it clear that this is no idle threat. There will be a five hundred dollar fine slapped on the first guy that throws a punch at a teammate!"

That was that. But the effect of Babe White's open support stuck with Cord. He felt different, somehow. He tried to figure it out. Something that had been inside him a long time was fading until it didn't seem of foremost importance. The thing that was important now was to give out. Other guys would come around to White's way of looking at him, give them time.

He took a riding from the Evaders again in the two game series there. He and Rigado engineered two double plays in the first game that saved runs. Cord parked a three-and-two pitch into the short left field stands for his first homer that day. It chased in two markers ahead of him. The Falcons took the opener 5-2.

Then in the second game, Cord Wallace had the poorest day he'd ever experienced on a ball field.

He hit for the old horsecollar in five trips to the dish, and three of the five times he went down, men were on the bases in scoring position. In the field it was worse. He booted an easy chance in the second frame that gave a life to the batter who should have been the third out, and it cost two runs. He messed up a double play in the eighth that allowed the enemy to chalk up the tying marker. The Evaders notched the winning tally in their ninth on a ball hit straight at Cord when it went right through his legs.

Amato Rigado said his spiel in the clubhouse, directed at Babe White.

"Any guy doing his share to earn the extra dough," Rigado said. "Deserves a break. Huh!"

V

CORD WALLACE walked miles that night when the Falcons returned home. He had to get some sort of an-

swer to the questions that plagued him. Things just couldn't go on like they were. He had never been lower in spirit.

He came to a sign over the sidewalk that blinked "Tavern" alternately in blue and red neon lights. Cord had never gone for liquor, for the simple reason that he was an athlete, wanted his reactions and perceptions at maximum efficiency at all times, and knew that alcohol contributes nothing to such efficiency. But now he thought of a skinny little guy who was an able bodied seaman on the ship Cord had been Navy forces commander. Cord could see in his mind's eye, the squinty little eyes and thin mouse colored hair of the guy. Squint, that's what they had called him. Cord could hear again the high-pitched, squeaky voice as it had been so many nights when some mate brought Squint back to the ship, drunker than any lord.

"Sure, I spent all m' money 'n' I'm drunk again! Man gets to thinkin' 'n' low in spirits, ain't nothin' like a coupla Sailor's Delights to perk 'im up. Always start with a Sailor's Delight."

Cord abruptly turned into the tavern. He sat down at a table in the corner and a radio was on a shelf above the table. A name band was giving out with a hit parade number. The place was not overly crowded this early in the evening and the barkeep himself came to take Cord's order.

"I want a Sailor's Delight," Cord said.

The barkeep didn't move and Cord looked up. The man in the soiled white apron was eyeing him doubtfully.

"A Sailor's Delight?" he said. "You know what you're ordering, son? I used to work in a joint on the coast and—well, I guess only men who go to sea can handle that drink."

"I want a Sailor's Delight," Cord repeated. "I've been to sea, mister."

The bartender shrugged, returned to the bar. Cord saw him pouring liquors out of various bottles. Some of them had labels of bourbon and rye and gin and rum and there were a couple that Cord couldn't read. It was a sizeable glass that the bartender set before him.

It tasted neither bad nor good. A kind of syrupy tang right at the end of the swallow killed the bite of the whiskey and it went down smooth. Cord didn't see the

barkeep's eyes bug as he drank down the concoction almost as though it was a glass of water.

"—Joyce Clayton, your Today Dramatized reporter." The voice was as clear in Cord's mind as though he was actually hearing it. He jerked up his head and stared around the room. But that was silly. Of course there was no sign of Joyce Clayton. She wouldn't be in a place like this. His head slumped forward. The Sailor's Delight abruptly hit him with all the authority of the mule kick that it contained.

"—the last run of the *S. S. Regalia*—"

Words seemed to be churning aimlessly in his head. The *Regalia*! That was the name of his ship! And suddenly then Cord was back in the vast stretches of the South Pacific and events of the day the Jap sub had torpedoed the *Regalia*. He was squirming, fighting the swells of the South Pacific. He could hear the stuttering chatter of the Jap machine gun. It was all mixed up with Joyce Clayton's voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen," her voice said. "Today Dramatized has presented a dramatization—weak as it must be compared to the real thing—of a terrible ordeal survived by only six men. One of those men is a member of our own Falcon baseball club. Another, and the narrator of this story to me, is here beside me. I assure you that WTZO has checked and double-checked his story and found it true in every detail. I give you Squint—he chooses to remain anonymous save for that cognomen—a seaman A.B., on the *Regalia*. Squint desires to say a few words about the hero of the disaster—Ensign Cord Wallace!"

A high squeaky voice sounded in the befuddled mind of Cord Wallace.

"I ain't much on the lingo business, folks. This here young lady tells me that Ensign Wallace ain't never mentioned to nobody 'bout the way he swum around in the water, and him with a banged up head and blood runnin' from an ear and one arm busted. But he swum and got every man Jack he could see bobbin' anywheres near the rafts, and drug 'em to the lifeboat. I can tell you that we wouldn't never have got away from the Jap 'ceptin' for the downright guts of Wallace in drivin' himself and the two or three of us able to do any rowin'.

"WALLACE was the second man in the boat, me bein' the first. He musta been clear outa his head, 'cause he called me Tony. He glared crazy-like at me when I told him I wasn't Tony and then he jumped in that water and swum to where another of the Navy boys clung to a bit of wreckage.

"Wallace brought that boy to the boat when you'da thought that every wave was gonna swamp them. It was Tony and the boy was still alive. He told me kinda proud like that Ensign Wallace and him was buddies and that Wallace had towed him to where he could hang onto the wreckage and a wave had knocked Wallace loose.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you gotta right to be proud of Ensign Wallace. The boy he risked his life to get into the boat didn't make it and five others didn't, but none of us woulda made it if it hadn't been for the plain downright Navy guts that Ensign Wallace had that kept us all fightin' to keep afloat."

A thundering roar filled Cord's senses. It was funny, it sounded like applause and then again it sounded like the roar of engines on the *Regalia* exploding. Everything was all mixed up. That Sailor's Delight was—

Cord never knew when the barkeep came over and shook him. He didn't hear the bartender grunt. "Mebbe you was to sea, son, but you sure ain't no regular Sailor's Delight customer. I hope you got something on you that shows where you live."

Cord Wallace was out cold.

CORD walked down the corridor beneath the stands to Dan Harn's office. It was about as tough a journey as it had been that morning ten days ago, but for a different reason. Oddly enough, the thing he felt now wasn't apprehension but a kind of let-downness. He was ready to go along with what the Naval doc had told him, it was up to Cord Wallace. He never would be able to get his mind completely off Tony Rigado and the torpedoing of the *Regalia*, but he had learned in these ten days that he could pick up the threads of his old life. Only he had come to one decision, in fairness to Dan Harn. It was better that he do it somewhere else than on the Falcons.

Dan Harn was seated behind the desk,

staring at a framed picture on the wall. It was a group photo of the Class C team that Dan had guided to a pennant in 1941. Cord Wallace and Tony Rigado were seated side by side. Beside the group picture was an autographed action shot of Amato Rigado.

The manager looked up when Cord came in. Cord didn't waste words.

"Dan," he said. "I want you to trade me. I've thought it all over, and that's the answer. I don't care where you send me, wherever you can get the best deal."

Dan Harn looked at the youngster a long space. When he spoke, it was apparently irrelevant.

"I've never asked you about—Tony, lad," Harn said softly. "I figured you'd tell me when you got around to it. Now I'm asking you. Did you—were you with Tony when it happened?"

For a second's fraction the old tightness was in Cord. Then he sighed. Dan was his friend. Dan wouldn't be trying to hurt him.

"I don't know," he said. "I honestly don't know. The last thing I remember clearly, Tony and I had run to the forward gun to bring it to bear on the sub. The after gun was smashed when the first torpedo hit."

Cord was hardly conscious that he was giving the manager the whole story. Somehow it wasn't hard. At the finish Dan said:

"The thing is that you aren't sure, that's why you can't stand up to Amato and ram what he believes down his throat. Suppose you *were* sure, lad?"

The quick light that leaped into Cord's eyes was answer enough. Dan Harn said curiously, "You didn't happen to listen to that program Joyce Clayton put on last night, lad?"

Cord flushed. "I didn't listen to anything," he said. "I—I guess I got drunk!"

Dan Harn hesitated, finally said, "Joyce Clayton's mother once straightened out a mess that Joyce's dad and me got ourselves into. Kinda like the misunderstanding between you and Rigado, lad. Joyce came to me last night with a plan to—to—well, suppose we wait till we see how it turns out. Let's wait and talk over this trade business after today's game."

Cord didn't feel any tenseness as he

walked out to his position. He was too full of puzzlement. He couldn't lay his finger on any definite thing, but the guys had all seemed different in the clubhouse, sort of clumsily trying to let him know that something had happened to change their attitude toward him. Cord shrugged it off. What difference did it make? He wouldn't be with the Falcons after today.

He hoped the Evaders would hit to him today, would try some of their funny stuff. He wondered what all the shouting and whistling and handclapping from the fans was about when the Falcons ran from the dugout to take the field. He didn't notice that the yells and cheers started when he came out.

Big Pete Clemons was on the pitching rubber for the Falcons. He finished his warm-up tosses, watched the throw through to second and walked toward Cord.

"Kid," the veteran pitcher said. "Looks like we've had the wrong slant on you. Maybe you've had the wrong slant on yourself. In spite of everything, I personally had a sneaky conviction all the time that you was four-for-four. The guys are a mite on the sheepish side about admitting it, but they all feel the same way. We're with you, kid. We'll show them flannel-mouth Evader monkeys today!"

Cord stared at the big pitcher. How about this? He flicked a glance at Rigado. The stocky shortstop met his gaze for a second's fraction and there was a puzzled reluctance in Rigado's black eyes before he looked away. Cord didn't get it. What went on?

The Evaders started right in on the rookie second sacker. But boos and cat-calls came from the fans at the first raucous bellow from Carrot Malone. Somebody shied a seat cushion from a box back of third base that took the redhead between the shoulders and quieted him somewhat.

Maybe Big Pete wasn't thoroughly warm. He walked the first hitter. A curve ball didn't break on the next guy and the sphere got past Hank Seburg. They had a man on second with nobody out. The guy in the rectangle caught one of Big Pete's fast ones on the nose and Ben Reft had to go to the barrier in deep right to snag the drive. The Evader on second romped to third after the catch. It didn't look good. It looked worse a minute later

when Big Pete could get only one pitch over the dish and the third hitter strolled to first on a free ticket. Rigado hustled in to the mound. Cord Wallace was right behind him.

"Stay in there, Pete, nothing to worry about," Rigado said. "We'll get the two for you."

CORD said, "Make 'em hit to me, big fellow." And he meant it. Rigado flicked a quick look at him, dropped his eyes.

Cord glanced at the hitter. It was the same guy who had made him look silly on the hit-and-run ten days ago. Cord had a sudden hunch that amounted to sureness.

"Feed him something outside," he called to Pete Clemons. The big pitcher gave him a sharp glance, grinned suddenly and nodded.

Cord edged toward second base, flagrantly advertising that he was out of position. He saw Carrot Malone paw the ground and he was sure that the hit-and-run sign was out. He moved a little closer to the bag.

Big Pete cut loose. The pitch was down the outside edge, perfect for the setup if the Evaders were planning what Cord figured. The runner on first broke from his tracks with the pitch. Cord feinted a step toward second, swayed his body and reversed fast. He saw the guy at the plate shift his feet and choke his bat and Cord knew he'd figured right. They were playing him for a sucker.

Cord fielded the ball right on the base line. He clutched the horsehide and he didn't spare the horses when he slammed the ball hard into the neck of the guy coming from first. The Evader tried to knock him over, barged into Cord but he bounced off Cord's braced bulk like a rubber balloon. The blond rookie whipped the sphere to Slatz Kitzz to complete the double play.

Then things broke loose. Carrot Malone raced out from the third base coaching box, roared down on Cord.

"You so-and-so! You blocked him out! The base runner's got rights! We'll—"

Amato Rigado jumped in front of the big redhead. Cord was busy with the guy he'd knocked down. The Evader had come

up swinging. But Cord heard Rigado say, "You'll what? Listen, Malone, that was a Falcon you tried to ride over roughshod. You don't do that to Falcons!"

Cord shoved the guy swinging at him aside. He wasn't gentle and the Evader landed on the seat of his pants. Cord was aware that Falcon players were converging from all parts of the field and pouring out of the dugout.

"What gives?" Carrot Malone stared at Rigado. "You told me yourself that—"

"I was a dope," Rigado cut in. "That stuff is out, Malone, and I mean *out*! You guys try to shove Wallace around any more and you're going to be shoving a flock of Falcon fists!"

The umps finally quelled the embryo riot and they were lenient. Umpires know the score most of the time. Nobody got banished. Rigado walked beside Cord to the dugout, sat down beside the blond rookie.

"I wasn't just exercising my molars when I told Malone I've been a dope."

He reached into his back pocket and dragged out a smudged, crumpled piece of paper.

"This is the last letter Tony wrote," he said. "He wrote it to Joyce Clayton. I guess the kid had a crush on her and she was kind enough to play along, although it didn't mean a thing to her. Tony met her once at that New York place where radio and stage and movie people take care of entertaining the boys."

A LIGHT flashed in Cord Wallace's head. He knew now why it had seemed as though he'd seen Joyce Clayton somewhere before. He remembered the picture of her he'd once seen in Tony's wallet.

"Mom used to tell Tony and me that Latin people were different, more emotionally sensitive and kind of psychic," Rigado went on. "I guess maybe there was something to it. The kid wrote this letter to Joyce Clayton and posted it just before the *Regalia* sailed that last time. He felt that he was gonna get it. And he knew the kind of hot-headed fool he had for a brother. He asked Joyce to see to it that I didn't hold it against you, if anything happened."

Rigado stopped. Cord didn't know what

to say. He still didn't understand a lot of things. Rigado scowled.

"I went crazy when the telegram came about Tony," he said. "I guess I knew deep down that it wasn't any fault of yours, but—well, I said I was crazy. I talked myself into believing that it wouldn't have happened if you'd been looking after Tony the way you should. I sold myself a buildup of you as the kind of guy who hadn't the guts to stick by a pal when it meant his own skin, and I passed that stuff out to the gang."

"I heard that broadcast last night, with Dan Harn. I fought against believing it. Dan made me go to Joyce Clayton this morning and she took me to meet that Squint guy. He convinced me that his story was on the level, that WTZO had turned things upside down to locate him, at the urging of Joyce Clayton. She showed me this letter to explain why she was so set on straightening things out. I—I—well, will you shake, Cord, and forget what a heel I've been?"

Dazedly Cord gripped the hand Rigado shoved out. Cord's head was in a whirl. He suddenly remembered the radio in the tavern the night before and how he'd been confused after drinking the Sailor's Delight. He *had* heard that program, but the unaccustomed effect of the drink had befuddled him. A great peace filled him. He was all choked up.

He was glad to feel the hand of Dan Harn on his shoulder. The eyes of the manager were soft and his other hand rested on the shoulder of Rigado.

"Looks as though things are getting on even keel," Dan said. "How about that trading business, lad?"

Cord grinned, swallowed the lump in his throat. He looked at Rigado.

"And leave this guy!" he said huskily. "How you talk, Dan! Why—why, we're from the same town!"

He looked up at the press coop high above the third deck of the stands. Joyce Clayton usually watched Falcon home games from up there in the WTZO broadcasting booth.

"And say, Dan," Cord said. "If you've got any influence with the radio guys, will you send word up to Miss Clayton that I'd like to see her after the game? I owe her more than an apology, now!"

THE KID TAKES OVER

By Harry Garth Quinn

His last pitch . . . his last game in the big time. It's hard to take after a lifetime of steamin' 'em in from the hill. But somehow the hurler taking his place made the whole thing seem natural and pleasant.

"GO in there and relieve Hughes!" I didn't move an inch from my position on the bullpen bench, just sat there looking out over the field. What pitcher was Joe sending in? Kranski maybe, or perhaps O'Brien. Both were good relief hurlers. Suddenly, however, I became conscious that someone was standing beside me.

"What're ya waiting for, Rube?"

He was talking to me! I looked up to see Joe Higgins waiting. There was a faint smile on his face as he handed me a ball.

"You haven't had much practice lately but I guess you still know how to use it."

I got up and started toward the mound.

When the crowd saw who was coming in to relieve they nearly yelled their heads off, not because of what I was but because of what I had been. They had heard about my release that morning and knew that this was my last game.

"Big Bill" Hughes met me on the mound. He was a good pitcher but even the best have their off days.

"Good luck, Rube. I hope you win this last one."

Win? I had almost forgotten what that word meant. I hadn't won a game all season and this was late in June. It was no wonder the Redskins were firing me.

Hughes turned back toward the dugout. Now everything was up to me.

The first batter stood a few feet from the plate while I took my practice throws and sized up the situation. The score was 5 to 4 against us, runners were on second and third and nobody was out. It was the last half of the fifth inning.

I finished my practice throws and watched the batter walk to the plate. He was a big guy and plenty tough but five,

even two, years before I could have put this mug out as easily as I could my cat. I worked carefully with this fellow and soon had worked the count up to three balls and two strikes, then he swung from his shoe tops and bounced the ball off the right field fence. When the dust settled two runs were in and he was standing on second base. Not a very good start.

I picked up the resin bag and rubbed up the ball, then I looked over at the dugout. Higgins was frowning and looking again at the players on the bench, his eyes finally settling on a new rookie pitcher. He was getting ready to take me out.

I stepped back on the mound and looked at the next batter, an 18-year-old just up from the minors. He was leaning over the plate, shaking his bat viciously. Who was this bum trying to scare anyway? It didn't take a McGraw to see that the kid was bluffing; underneath he was scared to death. That was one thing I liked about rookies, my name still meant something to them. Maybe the boy was thinking of the year I rolled up thirty victories or the time, while he was finishing grammar school, when I pitched my no-hitter.

My first pitch dusted the kid off and sent him scrambling in the dirt. When he picked himself up and went back to the plate I could see that he was shaken up. He just stood there shaking as I fired in three straight strikes, then walked back to the bench. At least I'd gotten one man out.

The next fella walked up to the plate swinging a couple of bats. One look and I had him tagged, he was a typical wise guy showing off for the crowd. My arm was now beginning to act up and my first three pitches went wide. The next pitch had to be good. I wound up and threw but the



ball whizzed past his chin. He tossed down his bat and trotted majestically over to first base.

I watched him go down, then I glanced once more at the dugout. The boss had sent the rookie pitcher over to the bullpen to warm up. It wouldn't be long now.

THE following batter hit my first pitch almost before it got to the plate and cracked it over the shortstop's head for a fluke single. The bases were loaded. I stood sweating as the opposing catcher walked to the plate. He was a giant of a man, as many catchers are, and with all the grace of a cow. The guy picked up the bat casually and spat a long stream of tobacco juice before he settled down to business. My first two pitches went a little bit wide, the average player would have swung at them but not this veteran, he just looked them over. I saw now that I'd have to give him a good pitch so I blazed in my de luxe curve. I didn't know it then but that was my last pitch in the big time. The big guy pulled a Babe Ruth and I could only watch as the ball rose higher, higher, then sank into the right field bleachers.

I stood on the mound waiting for the new pitcher. He talked to Higgins a moment, then turned and trotted out on the diamond.

"Well, kid, I guess I've sorta messed this game up for you."

He smiled but there was an unexplainable sympathy in that smile. He knew what I was feeling.

"Don't worry. We'll murder 'em."

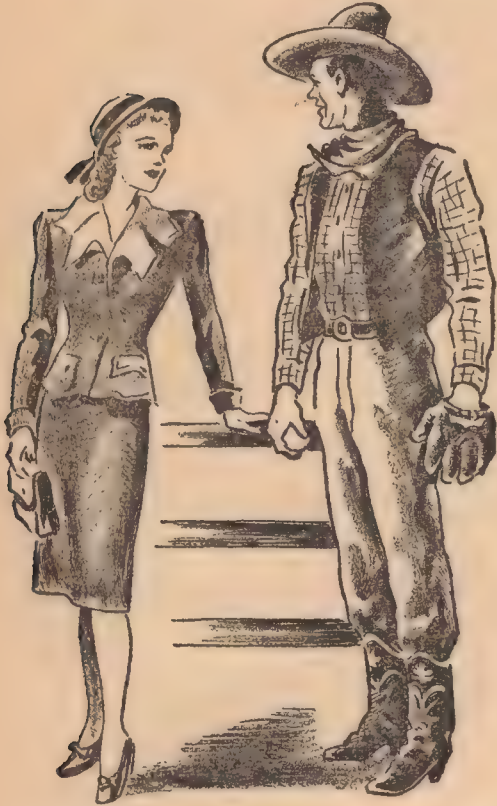
I turned and started that long walk back to the bench. It was my last and with each step I took I thought of one of those hundreds of little incidents that had made baseball a part of me. They say a dying man sees his whole life pass before him in his last few minutes. That was the way I felt as I walked off the field. Baseball had come to be as much a part of me as my heart or lungs and with it gone—well.

Reaching the sidelines I turned and gazed back at the boy who had taken my place on the mound. Only nineteen and already he was showing promise of becoming a truly great pitcher. That boy was the one bright spot. It's good to look out on the field and see that the man taking your place is your son.

Three Strikes For GI Joe

By Curtis Bishop

"Get the cash on the line and hoist the pennant flag. I'm the guy you've been waiting for," was busher Tex Tucker's greeting to the New York Comets. And Manager Muggsy Miller consented . . . for Miller was the circuit's ace deflater when it came to knocking the stuffing out of gas-filled, grandstand twirlers.



"I'm not a timid chap, if that's what you mean," Tex spouted.

AS the early afternoon sun settled squarely upon the press box, the gentlemen of the press slowly abdicated their sanctuary and retired to the shadiness of the unused players' bench.

There they sat in bored, unruffled majesty, sighing for the good old days when the grapefruit schedule was played in grapefruit country, far away from home-office supervision, and wondering how they could glean a new lead out of the New York Comet's third day of practice.

"It would be all right," sighed Ed Daily of the *Monitor*, "if I could just learn to

like baseball. After twenty years of it I still don't care for the game. Now, golf, that's something else. . . ."

Daily was interrupted by a tall young chap who thrust his head under the low-pitched dugout roof and inquired if there were any sports writers around.

There was a moment's silence. "Well, some of us have been called that," admitted Daily. "However, we won't push the argument if you believe otherwise."

The newcomer was so tall that he had to bend double to get under the concrete roof. High-heeled boots and a big sombrero added to his height.

"Gene Autry or the Lone Ranger!" guessed Homer Olsen, the *Blade* columnist.

"Neither," grinned the youth. "I'm a ball player."

"Then you have the wrong address," Daily said sourly. "There hasn't been a ball player around Fenton Park in ten years."

The young man sat down on the concrete steps facing them, pushed his sombrero back until they could see his black curly head, and gave them another grin.

"Don't kid me; that's my racket. Look, I just dropped over here to give you guys a break."

"That's nice of you," muttered Olsen. "Somebody ought to give us one."

"You've read stories about hicks from the bush leagues walking into training camp without even a suit or a glove and landing a major league contract, haven't you?" he demanded.

"Yep, but that's old," growled Daily. "Ring Lardner did it first and nobody has improved on his version."

"Well, it's just about to happen," announced the youth, standing up again and pulling his hat down over his eyebrows. "Me, I'm Tex Tucker, I ain't ever played



The veterans followed Tucker's every motion with hungry eyes.

a game of professional ball. I hitch-hiked my way up from Texas. Now I'm gonna walk out there, corner Muggsy Miller and pitch my way right into the big leagues."

He delivered the boast in a calm, self-confident voice. "In the first place," growled Daily, "the Comets ain't the big leagues. In the second place, you can't do it."

Tex Tucker grinned. "I don't blame you for being skeptical, gentlemen. But seeing is believing, isn't it? Stick around."

And with that he clumped up the steps and out onto the playing field.

The sports writers exchanged weird glances. "It's worth a gag story, anyhow," decided Daily, and he followed after the Longhorn youngster.

The other writers followed, but none too enthusiastically. This happened every Spring—a popoff guy coming up to the majors and voicing his boastful predic-

tions. Some of 'em had made good, too—Dizzy Trout, for instance. And Jerome H. Dean. But most of 'em turned out to be animal crackers, so the sports writers brushed 'em off with cracks like "he adores the ground he walks on," and "his life is an open book and he likes to read."

"In the first place," added Homer Olsen, who should know, "that accent isn't Texan. The guy's a phony."

But anyhow, they watched. It would be interesting to see what happened when the kid tangled with Muggsy Miller, the toughest manager in the big leagues. Muggsy had to be tough. He ran the Comets on a shoe-string and Daily hadn't exaggerated much when he had sneered that no major league ball player could be looking for Fenton Park. When Muggsy got a ball player he had to sell him quick to keep the club going. It was enough to make even a sweet-tempered guy cross and irritable.

He was watching his hopefuls go through their batting chores. The weather had been bad and the hitters were days ahead of the pitchers; the boys had their batting

eyes sharpened while Muggsy was holding the twirlers down to straight ones, without much smoke. As a result, the Comet batting order was looking good. Even Benny Levy, the shortstop, who was called "horse-collar" for reasons the batting averages substantiated, was smacking out line drives.

Muggsy intended to work his boys on hitting all spring, not because he believed a home run is the simplest way to score, but because that was what this collection of rookies and castoffs needed more than anything else. The previous season there hadn't been a single three hundred hitter on the club and, though some of his youngsters could run, the other clubs in the league persistently refused to alter the rules so that a ball player could steal first base. All spring Muggsy had ordered hit, hit, hit. And then, just before they turned in, and were so tired they could drop, he dished out more batting practice.

There was unquestionably more than passing resemblance between Muggsy and a bulldog. In the first place, their comparative size was about the same; the Comet skipper was five feet three inches high and the shortest man to ever catch in the big leagues. In the second instance, they had about the same countenance, though many bull dog lovers might object.

IT was to this square-jawed little terror of the diamond that the self-styled cowboy made his announcement—that he had come from Texas to pitch in the big leagues, and was the answer to a manager's prayer.

Muggsy looked him over, shrugged his broad shoulders. "The rodeo is in Madison Square Garden. And it ain't 'til November."

The youngster grinned.

"Some of these pitchers of yours can get a job there," said young Mister Tucker. "They ain't good for anything but beef."

Muggsy swore at his pitchers for twenty hours out of each twenty-four, but nobody else could talk about 'em and get by with it.

"I guess you wanna pitch some?" he barked.

"That's what I've been saying," snapped Tucker. "If you would spend more time listening to me and less time scowling at these hitters, you'd be better off."

The sports writers held their collective

breaths. The last rookie to talk to Muggsy like that had been shipped back to Oklahoma in several pieces.

But Muggsy did the unexpected. He looked the youngster over again, then nodded.

"Have a try. What can I lose?"

"Good," drawled Tex, and he shed his wind-breaker and went clomping toward the box.

"Hey, you can borrow a pair of shoes," Muggsy called after him.

"No call to change just for this," the youth called back over his shoulder. "I won't be out here long."

Which was just what the sports writers and Muggsy were thinking.

Tucker accepted the loan of the retiring pitcher's glove. Towering on the rubber in his weird cowboy getup, he threw several quick tosses to catcher Jeb Warren. Then, with a wave of his hand, he announced that he was ready.

So were the Comet hitters. The Comets didn't bubble with self-confidence against major league class, but this tall chump in the big boots . . . he was something different.

Levy was at the plate. His dark face cracked in a grin and he pounded his bat on the plate.

"Hi, ho, Silver!" he roared. "Put it in here and get back to Texas for the roundup in the spring."

The tall boy took a deliberate windup. Then he threw his first pitch, and the sports writers exchanged glances.

"A side-armed!" Daily whispered reverently. The only ball player Daily had ever admitted in print could pitch had been Carl Mays.

"A side-armed!" echoed Homer Olsen.

Their eyes leaped to Muggsy's face. The square-shouldered little bulldoog went on chewing his tobacco as if he hadn't seen anything.

But not so Benny Levy. The shortstop picked himself out of the dirt and shot a startled glance toward his skipper. When Muggsy showed no interest in Benny's plight, the little infielder shook his head sadly, knocked the dust out of his spikes and stepped back into the batter's box.

The tall youth pitched again. His side-armed delivery seemed freakish because of his height. His shoulder high pitch came

in bouncing all the way. Levy swung and missed.

Now the self-styled Texas cowboy changed pace. He threw it with the same motion, but it was a cripple blopping over the plate. Levy ducked involuntarily with the motion of the long right arm, then recovered his balance and took a poke at the sailer. He got a piece of it, just enough to lift it back into the pitcher's hands, a gentle popup.

Tex returned the borrowed glove to the amazed Comet pitcher and came clumping back to the thin-lipped Muggsy.

"Go on," growled Muggsy. "Throw a few more. Show me what you got."

"You've seen enough," grinned the cowboy, "for the kind of contract I want. You ready to talk?"

"What kind of contract you want?"

There was bound to be a catch to it somewhere, figured Muggsy. About the only financial advantage of playing with the Comets was that a ball player got a discount on the peanuts and soda pop he bought at the park.

"We won't argue much about terms," said Tex. "Let's go into your office; these have to be confidential."

"Go on in," waved Muggsy. "I'll be right behind you."

The scowling manager turned to the sports writers. "I don't believe it," he rasped. "It ain't true and it won't happen to me. But if you wanna print. . . I'm signing the kid."

Did they want to print it! The newsboys made a collective rush for the pay telephone underneath the grandstand.

"Wait for me," yelped Daily. "You boys ought not to take advantage of a man just because he's old and decrepit."

II

INSIDE his unpretentious office, Muggsy spit out his chewing tobacco, fell into his swivel chair, lifted his feet to the top of his desk and studied the youth through narrow, squinting eyes. Muggsy was short-sighted but wouldn't admit it, never had owned up to it even as a player. In his day, and with his type of game, ball players just didn't wear glasses. Or neckties either.

"Well, what's the catch?" demanded

Muggsy. He had every justification to be suspicious. Muggsy knew too much about the finances of the Comets; it was his misfortune to own sixty per cent of the stock. And anytime a ball player of promise came voluntarily into the Comet camp looking for a job, there had to be a catch. Particularly with the war just starting to strip the ranks of every club.

"There are two catches," smiled Tex.

"Let's have 'em one at a time."

"First, I want a bonus contract," announced the confident youth. "No Comet salary for me; I know about your salaries. I want five hundred bucks for every game I win. And expenses on the road, of course."

"Are you nuts! No rookie pitcher ever got a contract like that. It won't work out."

"Why not?"

"What if you don't win a game? What if I don't start you? What if I send you in to hurl a relief stint? No, son, that ain't baseball."

"If I don't win a game, I don't make a penny except expenses," was the immediate reply. "If I show I'm a winning pitcher, you'll start me regularly; you need a winning pitcher that bad. I'll hurl a just share of relief work without kicking. Naturally, if you want to make another Ace Adams out of me, you'll have to pay extra, but we can argue about that when it comes up."

Muggsy thought a minute. When he thought, his eyebrows came down over his eyes and he looked like the original sphinx. After due deliberation, he nodded.

"That much is possible. What else?"

"I want my unconditional release at the end of the season."

Muggsy lowered his feet from the desk. This was hitting close to home. It was no secret that the Comets were kept going by their manager's skill in developing ill-regarded rookies and selling them to more prosperous clubs. . . . Duckie Prewitt, for instance, at seventy-five grand to the Yankees, Clint Snead to the Sox for forty grand, Ed Hutchins to the Dodgers for twenty-five and three players!

"No," he growled.

"Why not?" countered Tucker. "All right, I'm familiar with your practice. Don't gimme my unconditional release.

But I get fifty per cent of the purchase price and you guarantee to trade me as soon as the season is over."

Muggsy did not comment while he reached into his pocket and pulled out his plug of tobacco and bit off a huge hunk. Nothing ever interfered with this ritual. It was necessary to his thinking.

"No," he said again.

"Okay," shrugged Tex. "I can make a deal somewhere else."

"Wait a minute," Muggsy growled. That hit him in the right spot. Tucker could make a deal Muggsy didn't have to watch a man pitch all day to know he had something on the ball.

"Why did you come to me in the first place?" he demanded after a moment.

"Good reasons," Tucker shot back. "I can make your pitching staff even throwing left-handed. I don't want to spend a year in the minors and the good clubs are full up with pitchers. But with the Comets I start plenty of ball games and win some victories, though I realize I may have to pitch a shutout to do it. At the end of the year, I'm big league timber and everybody knows it. So I get myself traded or my release and make a deal."

"What would I get right now?" he demanded as Muggsy continued blinking. "Chicken feed! Maybe five grand for signing after they watched me pitch a whole game. But not much more. Big league scouts never heard of me. They didn't get down to my part of the country."

"Where is that?" the Comet skipper demanded.

"College ball," the youngster said evasively. "Didn't show too much. Didn't have to."

Muggsy sighed again. Of all the brash rookies he had ever seen, this self-styled cowboy from Texas got the cake, including all of the icing and a monopoly on licking the pan. Nothing would have made Muggsy happier than to have pitched tall Mister Tucker out on his ear. But Muggsy just sighed again and quit thinking about such a welcome project. He knew, even as he held out, that he was going to do what this youngster said. He was going to sign him, loop-holes included.

But there was no law against a man putting off surrender as long as possible.

The youth sat down at the battered typewriter at the other desk in the room, which had been occupied by the manager's secretary back in the days when the Comets could afford one, and before Muggsy's daughter started doing the most essential work on her days off from her other, and her *paying*, occupation.

"We can make it brief," Tex said, pecking away at the keys. "I don't care much for these long drawn-out contracts."

Muggsy's jaws pumped methodically but he did not protest as Tex Tucker continued with his typing. He finished, and handed the paper to Muggsy with a grin of triumph.

"You can write, I suppose!"

"There's one clause omitted here," growled baseball's David Harum. "There ain't nothing in here about fines. They come out of your check just like you were drawing a salary, and when I fine somebody I ain't kidding. Just to show you, that crack of yours will cost you fifty bucks if you ever have a check coming."

"I understand," grinned Tex.

He held out his hand and, before Muggsy knew what he was doing the Comet manager had shaken it.

"You're made, Muggsy, old boy," chortled Tucker. "Your bank account will be a lot fatter come next spring. What time is the morning workout?"

"Ten o'clock," Muggsy answered weakly. A manager could take just so much.

"I'll be on hand," Tex assured him. "Now excuse me. I imagine the newsboys want to take pictures. A big league star has to get along with the press, you know."

He was right. The photographers were waiting outside.

Muggsy lingered in his office, hoping to find the sports writers gone when he returned to the diamond. But they were still there, waiting impatiently.

"Is this the McCoy?" demanded Daily.

Muggsy nodded, not trusting himself to speak.

"I still don't believe it," snarled Daily. "Some other manager might hand out a contract like that, but not Muggsy Miller."

Then, pulling his hat down over his eyebrows: "But I guess it's okay," he sighed. "That's the trouble with base-

ball, something screwy always happening. Never did like the damned game anyhow."

IT was in Tucker's contract that the club pay his expenses on the road, which included the "Grapefruit" season, of course. Muggsy found out immediately that the young cowboy did not believe in getting by on a shoe-string. The Comets could simply sign at the hotel for their meals, and not even the hefty right fielder, Jill Herman, had ever run up a board bill bigger than \$25 a week. But that was just a starter for Tucker. The pop-off kid had expensive tastes. He wanted a special mushroom sauce prepared for his beefsteak and none of the regular menus ever pleased him. And he had to have special entrees.

Had it not been that Tex showed up far better in the first training camp game than any of the veteran staff, Muggsy might have even then tried to squirm out of the freak contract. Muggsy did not believe in big expense accounts. When he broke into baseball, a man had to deliver to rate even a buck a day for grub.

A buck would just about buy Mister Tucker's breakfast, if the rookie wasn't very hungry.

But, after the second spring game, Muggsy could only sigh and study the railroad timetables to see if he could cut the training season short by two games or so and thus get back to New York for the opener with at least enough money to meet the first week's payroll. For Tucker went out and pitched three hitless innings against the National League champs.

The Cards simply couldn't handle his slide-arm speed. Lefty Warmouth did the first three innings, and the southpaw could still make his high hard one jump in spite of his 35 years. Warmouth gave the Cards just one hit before bowing out in Tucker's favor. He had walked a batter and one was safe when Levy placidly ignored a fly ball that dropped in short left field. With only one out Tucker went striding out to the box and the Cards let out squeals of delight and stood on the base paths shouting their invectives until the head umpire banished them to the shelter of the dugout.

Tucker walked to the mound with slow deliberate steps, seemingly unconscious of

the uproar. He had eyes only for the batter, spindly-legged Skipper Haley, the shortstop. Haley could clout a ball in the clutch; this was no easy assignment. But Tex Tucker fed him three straight fast ones and Haley was out.

Then Ducky Thompson, the center fielder, lofted one high and soft, an easy catch for Levy in short center. That retired the side, and only then did Tex notice the Cardinal bench. He walked toward it and stood glaring, hand on hips.

"Why don't you pups stay in your kennel?" he growled.

No one had ever accused the Cards of walking out on a fight. Out bounced two of the pitching staff, and there was a blow struck, a glancing swing that bounced off Tucker's shoulder. Out of the park went a Card hurler while Tex Tucker went on to pitch three scoreless innings before going to the showers.

Muggsy eyed the rookie thoughtfully. He liked ball players who were willing to stand up to an opposing bench and trade 'em. But he had noticed that Tucker made no pretense at fighting back. He had ducked the blow, that was all. He had baited the Cardinals out of their dug-out once more, into swinging at him, and into fines. Muggsy found himself wondering if Tucker really did have a chip on his shoulder or if his new rookie was all bluff.

Tex had that latter quality—the bluff. Muggsy read in the paper the next day that he was planning to start his new pitching find in the opening game.

He was reading the sports sheet in the hotel lobby, comfortably reclining in an easy chair and aiming his masticated tobacco at a nearby spittoon.

So excited did he become that he missed the spittoon, which he regretted immediately.

"Tucker," he shouted at the rookie, his face as red as a beet, "are you responsible for this?"

"Sure," was the bland answer. "You are going to start me, aren't you?"

"No," growled the manager. "Hell, no. Henslee starts. You'll be lucky if you start a game before mid-July."

"Nuts on that stuff, Muggsy," shot back the unsquelchable one. "You'll be holler-ing for me before the seventh inning."

"I'm going to fine you fifty more,"

snarled Muggsy. "That makes you owe this ball club a hundred bucks, Tucker."

"Oh, that's okay. Just one-fifth of a ball game. My bank account will be in the black before the week is over."

Muggsy retreated shaking his bushy head. He got twelve grand for managing the Comets . . . and a cut of the profits whenever there were any. He was now of the frame of mind that it wasn't worth it.

III

BACK in New York Muggsy threw Henslee against the Senators and won 4-2 decision, then maneuvered Lefty Hurst, the veteran Warmouth and another rookie, Bert Zeelum, through nine painful innings and a 7-6 triumph the next day.

Then his infield and pitching staff fell apart simultaneously. The Sox took three straight and the Indians won two out of three. Then the Browns took three out of four and that was all the sports writers could stand. Tex had been talking to them, and even the conservative Daily took the rookie's side.

"Why doesn't Muggsy start Tucker?" demanded the veteran scribe in his column. "It will cost the club five hundred dollars if the rookie wins, yes. But Tucker's audacity and confidence are enough to justify a starting assignment, let alone his record in Spring training. This youth is paying his own living expenses while the team is at home. When Muggsy consented to such a contract, he obligated himself to at least give Tucker a trial."

And on he went for a full column. The other writers took up the hue and the cry. The fans joined in. Muggsy, an institution with the Comet faithful, who fully realized his financial difficulties, found himself the object of a resounding "boo" when he appeared at home plate the following afternoon to discuss the day's ground rules with the Browns' pilot.

And the night papers carried further condemnation. They lost another ball game 8-5. Decent pitching would have held up a 4-1 lead taken in the first three innings.

In the seventh, when Joe Hollingsworth walked two straight batters, the fans started to yowl for Tucker.

Muggsy ignored the demonstration. He sent out Mike Carter, and let Carter stay on the mound for two inglorious innings. He refused to see the sports writers after the game, which was unusual. He didn't want to talk about a starting assignment for the upstart rookie.

But it was not so easy to put off another critic—his daughter, Beth. Busy with her college work, Beth hadn't met the latest addition to the Comet roster. She had lab every afternoon and wouldn't get out to the park until school was out. But she looked up accusingly from Daily's column. The thin-lipped sports writer was her favorite expert, even though he rode her father the hardest.

"Pops, why don't you start Tucker?"

Muggsy looked up from his paper. "Because I'm running the Comets and I start whom I please."

"But the poor kid deserves a chance, dad," she argued. "Besides, what can you lose? Look what the rest of your staff is doing."

Beth knew her baseball, as a daughter of Muggsy Miller naturally would. She was an attractive girl, almost beautiful, and, to use a trite description, the "very apple of her father's eye."

He relaxed his grimness long enough to grin. "The old man still knows how to handle a ball club, honey. I got good reasons for playing along with Tucker."

"What?"

"Ask me no questions," shrugged Muggsy, "and I'll tell you no lies. But I know what I'm doing."

Then, leaning back and returning his attention to the newspaper, "But if you just hafta know, I'm starting him Thursday night against the Tigers."

"The Tigers! Pops, that's awful!" exclaimed Beth. Then, with a smile: "Oh, I know. I read in the papers that Mister Tucker is very sold on himself. You want to get the conceit knocked out of him."

"Maybe I do and then mebbe I don't. Anyhow, I ain't talking."

And on his weather-beaten face was the smug look of a cat which is just about to swallow a mouse.

"I have a date that night," Beth said slowly. "Maybe I can talk him into taking me to the game."

"You can do that," conceded her father, "especially when he finds out the gateman won't take your money."

Beth made a mouth at her father as he disappeared behind the sports pages.

THE Comets dropped another ball game as the Tigers brought their heavy hitters to town and shellacked three of Miller's hurlers to the tune of 11-3.

Throughout the game there were shouts of "we want Tucker, we want Tucker."

In the seventh inning the rookie stepped out of the dugout to carry a message from Muggsy to the third base coach and was greeted by a burst of applause. A faint smile curved the skipper's face.

After the game he went into his office and waited for the writers to jump him.

"When do we get Tucker?" demanded Daily. "This has gone on long enough, Muggsy. The fans are going to start blacklisting the Comets if you don't give the kid a chance."

"They practically do already," sighed Muggsy. Then, carrying on his act: "But I'll give him a chance," he conceded. "He starts tomorrow night."

"Against the Tigers?" frowned Daily. "You believe in making it rough on the kid, don't you?"

"Look," wailed Muggsy. "I can't please everybody. You guys hound me to death to let the kid pitch. Then when I give him an assignment, you start hounding me about making it rough on him. If he is half the pitcher he thinks he is, the Tigers won't bother him. Anyhow, that's the score. He starts tomorrow night."

So they printed it in their early editions.

Young Mister Tucker, pressed for a statement, allowed that this was all right with him.

"They don't scare me. How can they hit what they can't see."

In honor of the occasion he posed for a new set of pictures. Even the sports writers who had not taken up his cause were impressed by the news value of Muggsy's announcement that the talkative one would go against the Tigers.

"There is no doubt of it," editorialized Olsen, "this Tucker is the most colorful rookie since Lou Novikoff. His unusual contract with the Comets, his refusal to spend even a year in the minors, his boast that he would win twenty games in his freshman season, the attention he has attracted from the press . . . all this has made Mister Tucker a Cinderella boy, a foastful Cinderella, yes, but still the personification of the "rags to riches" story that America loves. Perhaps this writer is being premature in speaking about the riches; Tucker may not realize a single dime this season. But one must hand it to him for intestinal fortitude, and, in spite of a strong antipathy for popoff guys, this writer finds himself wishing Tucker well."

But the Tigers, proud of their hitting ability, entertained no such good wishes toward the talkative rookie. They issued all sorts of threats as they took their batting and infield. And, when lead-off man Jim Hoover came up to the plate, it was evident that the sluggers were out to make mince-meat of the side-armed.

Muggsy, however, was pleased today. Not since the last time the Comets had been in a World Series had such a crowd turned out. The arc lights beating down on the stands gave the white faces an eerie touch. And indeed it did seem unreal . . . these many people to see a rookie's first start in the big show.

He had talked himself into this spot; now he had to pitch his way out of it.

SEEMINGLY cool and unconcerned, Tex kicked at the dirt around the box. Actually his heart was in his throat, and butterflies jumped around in his stomach.

Hoover was a hitter and, like all the Tigers, he didn't mind swinging at the first pitch. It was a little inside but he took his cut nevertheless and fouled one high and deep.

A right-handed hitter who pulled too much for the good of his batting average—Muggsy had known that, of course, and had shifted left-fielder Bob Vick almost to the sidelines. Vick was under the foul after a long run. The first batter had been retired.

Tex took a deliberate windup and tried to bait Georgie Cronin with an outside



"I'm the answer to any manager's prayers," Tex called out.

pitch. His side-arm speed ball came in low. Cronin took a cut and missed.

Muggsy chuckled. The sports writers and fans had razed him for sending the kid against the Tigers in a night game. Well, wasn't a low-ball pitcher just the antidote for the Tigers under the lights—the Tigers who were high-ball pitchers and murdered fast-ball pitching around the letters and shoulders!

Cronin took two more cuts and retired to the bench in disgust. Came Bing Redmond, first-baseman and home-run king of the league. He got a piece of Tucker's first offering and slammed it out to right center. But it was right in the hands of Ernie Camp, swung over from right field for this slugger. Three up and three down.

There was an ovation for Tucker as he stalked to the bench.

Gib Borden was as stingy for the Tigers and they went one-two-three innings like that. Not a man reached first base. The tall Texan had his fast one clicking the inside corner, pitching right at the big mitt of Pedro Vega, the Cuban catcher. He was an old hand, Pedro. Muggsy used him mostly for coaching these days, for Pedro couldn't hit his weight and was as slow on the bases as a waitress bringing the second cup of coffee. But Vega knew his hitters. He knew that a low fast

ball around the knees and inside is poison under the lights for any hitter. As long as Tex kept hitting his mitt with steam on the ball they could handle the Tigers.

Tucker kept fogging 'em in there. Randy Smith got a double off him in the fourth and Dave Ellsworth a single in the sixth, but there was no further damage. And a double play picked off Ellsworth before he could advance a base.

The scoreboard showed a string of zeros when Tucker came up to bat to start the Comet half of the sixth inning. The near-capacity crowd gave him a big hand.

Tex flashed a grin, dug his cleats and shortened his bat grip. Borden looked him over and shook off a signal. The Tiger pitcher all of a sudden felt this boy could hit. He had that look about him.

One was wide and then Borden tried his curve. Tex poled a deep single to right field.

None away. The rookie hurler pulled on his windbreaker and watched for signals. Muggsy nodded approvingly. He liked to see pitchers who were ball-players off the mound as well as on. This kid could hit and he was awake on the base paths.

Levy laid one in the dirt and Tucker streaked for second. The third baseman

thought he saw a chance for a force play and threw to second, but Tex slid in under the shortstop's glove and both hands were safe with still none away.

There were no lusty hitters in the Comet lineup but Muggsy's discarded veterans were adept at bunting and the hit and run. Limpy Scraggs slashed one through short and the rookie pitcher further endeared himself to the Comet rooters, who knew their inside baseball.

He danced off second base, darted in front of the ground ball, screened it from the view of the shortstop; then leaped aside and raced for third base just in time to avoid being hit by the roller.

The shortstop fumbled, then threw wild to third in a hurried attempt to catch the lead runner.

Tex seemed to sense that the throw was wild, for he turned third without slowing up and went racing for the plate while the Tiger hot corner guardian hurried frantically after the ball. The play at home was close but Tucket got the umpire's nod and there was a run on the center-field scoreboard. The fans gave Tucker a rousing cheer as he scrambled to his feet after his hook slide and slapped the dust from his pants.

One-nothing!

It ended that way. The Tigers corralled only three hits, one of them an extra-base blow. Borden was as stingy, allowing the same number of bingles, but that single run was the payoff.

The sports scribes scrambled hurriedly out of the park while their photographers used up rationed flash bulbs in the glare of the dressing room snapping pictures of the new sensation.

One of them had gotten a good action shot of the pitcher sliding home. It appeared the next morning under the caption: "A Five-Hundred Dollar Run."

The newsboys did themselves proud with their Cinderella story.

Muggsy walked down to the corner cigar store for a fresh plug of tobacco about midnight and, of course, came home with the sports sheets. Beth came in from her date and greeted her father with a hug.

"Pops, you're made!" she ejaculated. "That boy wonder of yours is a twenty-game winner, for sure."

"Yeah," Muggsy answered skeptically. Then he dived behind the sports pages and read the same thing under the by-lines of Daily, Olsen and the other boys. They went overboard for swaggering Tex. Muggsy read their accounts, and a grin spread around the corners of his mouth.

IV

YET it was a week before he announced that he was starting Tucker again. This was a Saturday night, too. The opposition was the red-hot St. Louis club.

The New York press rode Muggsy. They accused the skipper of deliberately picking the rough spots for Tucker because of that "five-hundred-per-win" contract. Tucker confirmed this in an interview and boasted that it was all right with him.

"I like the tough ones," he declaimed. "Throw me against the hot teams; I'll cool 'em off."

Which was just what he did to the Browns. This time he didn't have to score the winning run himself; the Comets backed him up with a four-run barrage in the second inning and he had won his second start as a big-leaguer 4-2.

That night Beth didn't have a date, but she didn't miss the ball game anyhow. She made her father take her with him, and she sat through the long infield and batting practice workouts and then waited outside the dressing room until past midnight for her beetle-browed father.

He had been delayed by a press conference. The newsboys had wanted another interview with him. And with Tex.

They came out in a mob, Muggsy and a half-dozen sports writers and the Texan, who seemed taller than usual in his street clothes. Muggsy took his daughter's arm and started off with her with a nod of dismissal to the writers, but Tucker was right there.

He wasn't a timid chap in the ladies' league either.

"Wait a minute, Muggsy," he protested. "If I'm not mistaken this young lady would be tickled pink to meet the great Tucker."

Beth double-crossed her father, who was reproving Tucker's temerity with a glare.

"She certainly would," she said brightly.

While Muggsy glared, she chuckled. "My father seems to be tongue-tied or something. I'm Beth Miller."

"His daughter!" gaped Tex.

Beth nodded. "Well, that beats a hawg a-flying," drawled the rookie. "I'm sure glad you don't look like him."

A mischievous smile of appreciation curved Beth's lips. She never tired of baiting her father, and was the only person in the world who could get by with it.

"See you tomorrow, Tucker," Muggsy grunted, almost pulling Beth away from the door.

"What do you waste your time on that mug for?" Miller demanded as they walked toward a street car. "We got some nice kids on the team; you don't hafta make a play for Tucker."

"I think he's nice," declared Beth. "And can he pitch! It was a lucky day for the Comets when he came to your training camp."

"Yeah," muttered Muggsy, not a bit of conviction in his tone.

"Father, you're letting your personal feelings overshadow your baseball judgment," preached the girl. When she addressed him as "father," she always had a sermon to deliver. "Tucker's personality is no business of yours. He can pitch and that's what you need."

Muggsy's jaw tightened. "I'll attend to the ball club," he growled. "Your worry is getting a college degree and scrambling some eggs when we get home."

She did not press the issue further. She knew her father when that chin was out. And challenging his judgment on a ball player was like running pell-mell into a buzz-saw.

But she made up her mind that when Tex Tucker called she would be glad to see him. And something told her he would call.

Her hunch came true before another twenty-four hours had passed. The moment the telephone rang, her instincts told her the identity of the caller. She surprised her father by beating him to the telephone stand.

"Yes? . . . Oh, hello, Mr. Tucker. . . . Yes, Mr. Tucker. . . . All right. . . . Yes, Mr. Tucker. . . . Good-bye, Mr. Tucker!"

She came back into the living room with her eyes shining. Muggsy took one look

at her and snorted. "Yes, Mr. Tucker!" Then, more seriously: "Honey, I'm not trying to pass on your talent but. . . ."

"No buts," Beth interrupted firmly. "You can't tell about 'em until they get up at the plate, Muggsy Miller. Al Simmons didn't look like he could hit either."

"Okay, okay," Muggsy sighed, and returned to his reading. Some day he should learn never to argue with his daughter.

"Mr. Tucker" arrived promptly at eight and an hour later they were dancing at a nightclub. Beth found him a surprising young man. He exhibited little of the swagger that distinguished him on the baseball field. He was self-confident, yes; there was sureness in his speech and the tilt of his chin. But no overbearing bully.

"You are a strange person," she said after another hour and their acquaintance had reached the stage where she could comment on such a travesty. "What is this what-a-man stuff, an act?"

"Exactly," he grinned.

"Why? What do you expect to get out of it?"

"Publicity," he answered promptly. "A reputation for color. Box office appeal. And then, this Winter, money."

Beth had not known the details of his contract with her father. He explained, and her eyes widened.

"Pops signed a contract like that!"

"He did," Tex nodded.

"Is that fair to the club?" she demanded. "Pops takes you, makes a ball player out of you, and then you can throw yourself on the market and pocket most of the purchase price yourself."

"Wait a minute," he shot back. "Muggsy hasn't taught me a thing. He didn't even send out a scout to look me over; I came into camp on my own time and own expenses. I get nothing but five hundred bucks every time I win a ball game. No manager ever signed a fairer contract."

"Yes, I suppose that's so," she was forced to admit.

"He can sell me for a hundred grand this Winter," Tucker went on. "He gets half of that. It's the best deal he ever made."

"You're sure of yourself, aren't you?"

she laughed. "A hundred grand is plenty of cash."

"He'll get it," Tex predicted.

But he wasn't issuing a boast, he was simply making a statement he was sure of. And, looking at him, the girl was suddenly sure of it, too.

"But this clowning of yours?" she protested. "Do you have to make it so raw? Do you have to make my dad out such a heel to the papers?"

"I'm trying to make myself look good," he shrugged. "Your father won't pitch me regularly. The only thing I can do is to squawk and get it into the papers that he won't pitch me every fourth day because he is too tight to pay me off for the ball games I win."

"Why won't he pitch you regularly?" she mused. "I don't think the contract is all that keeps him from doing it. The club is hard-pressed, yes, but if you won twenty games you would just be making ten thousand and Pops would pay that for a twenty-game winner anyhow."

"That's what I thought," said Tucker. "I picked out the Comets because I figured it would be a cinch to win a regular starting assignment."

"But Pops has some reason," Beth said loyally. "He knows ball players; nobody in the game knows them like he does."

Tactfully he dropped the subject. He was not there to argue about the merit of Muggsy as a manager. He had no time for such triviality.

This was, he told himself, only the beginning of such evenings. Beth Miller had his number.

MUGGSY yielded to the demands of the press and the fans and started Tex in a Sunday afternoon game. The opposition was the weak-hitting Senators. Good pitching and fielding, the Sens, but no hitters. The loyal fans figured Tex would have a breeze.

He seemed to have his stuff. He struck out Casey, the lead-off man, and Hendrix flied to short right field.

Then things started to happen. First, Hill slammed a single to center. Then Montgomery worked the rookie to a 3-1 count.

Perhaps Tex Tucker was careless. Perhaps Tex figured it was better to risk

Montgomery hitting one than to walk him, and put two runners on base—one in a tying position.

Anyhow, he brought in his fast ball straight down the middle. Low, yes; this side-armed kept all of his pitches low.

Montgomery wasn't waiting for a walk. There were two away; he looked at the bench and manager Hargrove told him to take his cut if he felt like it.

Something told Montgomery the moment Tex Tucker finished his windup that he felt like hitting.

The pitch had enough speed on it to keep him from pulling it into the left-field stands, but Montgomery hit it squarely and hit it hard. The Comet center-fielder started running like mad. It was 450 feet to that wall in center-field and only a few of the great sluggers had ever hit one out of the park.

Montgomery's screaming line drive hit the fence on the fly. He reached third base before the ball was retrieved to the infield. Hill scored.

Came Lefty Garcia, the Cuban first baseman. Garcia let a called strike go by, then chopped at one low and inside. He hit it like a golfer—off the tee. First-baseman Boswell dived for it and knocked the grounder down, but Montgomery came in home and Garcia was safe at first.

Tex smiled calmly and confidently and went back to the mound. But his mates didn't share his confidence. These last two balls had been hit solid—right on the nose.

Cal Henry was fooled by a change of pace and sent a roller down to shortstop Levy that should have been an easy out, but the usually dependable Levy let it go between his legs and Garcia tore all the way to third base. Runners on first and third. Henry went down with the first pitch unchallenged. That was the trouble with using Vega behind the plate. The old boy knew his pitchers, but he couldn't throw to the bases.

Still unperturbed, Tex went to work on Jim Redmond. He got a 2-0 lead and tried his curve. Not much of a curve, this side-armed bender. Redmond let it go for a ball. Then another ball. Redmond was still in the hole but he was too old a hand to bite.

None of the Senators would bite for

that matter. They weren't Dimaggios and they knew it. Any one of 'em was ready to settle for a walk.

Tex wanted to bait Redmond with another low pitch but it was 2-2 now and Vega signaled for him to bring in his speed. He nodded. All he had in his long right arm went into that pitch and it was a thin white blur stretching toward the plate.

But Redmond was set for it. The veteran knew the fast one would come in there. He knew it would come in low. He had his bat choked and he slashed a grounder right back through the box. Tex nearly broke his back diving for it but the ball eluded him and went rolling into center field.

The delighted Garcia and Henry came tearing around for home. There was no play made on the latter.

Three runs on four solid base hits! Muggsy Miller stepped out of the dugout and waved vigorously to southpaw War-mouth.

For a moment Tex stood motionless on the mound, amazed, resentful.

Then, from above him, came the shouts: "That's the stuff, Muggsy. Get the big bum out of there!"

"Take a shower, Tucker. Whoever told you that you could pitch anyhow?"

"Back in Texas he could pitch hay!"

"He should have stayed in Texas!"

Tex was learning that the mob just has room in its collective heart for one pitcher—the one who is winning.

He jammed his glove into his hip pocket and swaggered off defiantly. To the delighted Senators he roared his challenge:

"Just wait! I'll get you bums next time."

He came to the bench, his face as black as a thundercloud. No one spoke to him. One of the boys got up and made room for him by Muggsy and he slumped there, unhappy, angry.

"Well," he growled at Muggsy, "I can't win 'em all." It was his idea to beat Muggsy to the draw. But his defense was unnecessary.

"Sure you can't," the manager said amiably. "Forget it, kiddo."

It was the first kind word Muggsy had ever spoken to him and Tex Tucker wasn't sure how to take it.

BUT there were other nights. Tex came back to blank the Indians with three hits and the Tigers with four. That brought him to mid-season with four victories against one defeat, and there was considerable agitation among the fans for him to be named to the all-star lineup. He wasn't, and the press that had been on his side ever since his spectacular arrival at the Comet training camp blazed out in criticism of Muggsy Miller. Had the Comet rookie been given more opportunities to prove himself, reasoned the scribes, he would have been a certain choice.

Tex believed what the scribes wrote about him. He challenged Muggsy before the entire club.

"When do I start getting a square deal, Muggsy?"

He had tipped off Daily and Olsen as to what was going to happen and the two newspapermen were loitering nearby.

This was worse than heresy. The old-timers could recall when Muggsy had been a young man, a "boy wonder" as a manager. It was Ike Furness—or Jim Wilson, the stories differed—who had challenged one of Muggsy's decisions. Muggsy, so the story ran, picked up a bat and made for the offending player with mayhem in his eyes. Furness took one look, then wheeled and broke for the open territory with the manager on his heels. Twice the rebellious player circled the playing field with the irate manager right after him and the fans roaring in laughing and placing bets as to whether or not Miller would catch him. Then Furness had raced to the fence and vaulted over it, barely missing the bat which Muggsy had thrown at him in a last angry gesture.

So the Comet bench held its breath. Until Tex Tucker.

To their amazement Muggsy did not reach for a bat or even catcher Vega's mask, which was lying right by him on the bench and was handier. Instead Benton studied the rookie a moment, then said quietly:

"Come into the office, Tucker. I want to talk to you."

They wondered as manager and player disappeared if Muggsy had learned more

self-control and was merely getting the tall rookie out of sight of the fans before slamming with an iron pipe or maybe a cleated shoe. There was speculation as to whether or not Tucker would return to the bench all in one piece.

But there was no fight. There was even no argument. Muggsy looked at Tex across his battered desk and said quietly:

"Such talk doesn't do either of us any good, Tucker. If you get the reputation of being a trouble-maker, you'll kill my chance of selling you this Winter."

Tex Tucker choked back his anger. That was so. He nodded. "Okay, Skipper. I can wait 'til Winter to make some dough. The next manager I pitch for might want victories."

Muggsy kept his silence.

The Comet players shook their heads. It hurt to admit that Muggsy was slipping.

From then on there was a strained silence between rookie and manager. Even when they met in the Miller living room. Tucker continued his interviews with the press, and the scribes did not let up in their vicious attacks.

At the end of the season Tex had won eleven games and lost five. Two of those defeats could not be charged to his ineffectiveness. He did not win acclaim as the "rookie of the year"; hard-working Cy Rawlings of the Tigers earned that distinction. But it was generally conceded that here was a youngster who had the stuff and the heart to become great.

Two days after the Series, Muggsy announced that Tucker was on the auction block. No players would be taken in the exchange, a cash deal was wanted.

Three days after the Series Tex proposed to Miller's daughter.

Four days after the Cardinals had dropped their world's championship, she accepted him.

It was a hard choice to make. Marrying Tex meant breaking with her father.

When she told him that she was choosing Tex he looked off a minute and then looked back, his beetle brows low over his eyes, his lined face expressionless.

"I hope you're happy," he said harshly. "I'm afraid you won't be."

"I wish you would try to understand Tex, Pops," she said tearfully.

"I understand him," Muggsy shrugged. "I know him pretty well. There never was a ball player yet who could fool me. And don't worry too much, honey. There might come a day when young Tucker and I get along better."

"I hope so, Pops," she said fervently. And then she cried on his shoulder like a little girl.

She felt optimistic about the prospect of a future reconciliation between her husband and her father also. Sooner or later Muggsy would realize that Tex was an entirely different character off the field. Muggsy would see that the pitcher's boastfulness was just his idea of color, just his scheme to build up box appeal. Tex had studied baseball. He had figured out it was the popoff guy like Dizzy Dean or Babe Herman who drew the crowds. He had confessed to Beth that Dean had been his inspiration. And he had been impressed by Herman's record . . . a man laughed at as a bonehead and a numbskull who had actually been a great ball player and had amassed a respectable fortune out of the game.

Behind that "baseball face" he was a likeable earnest young man, almost boyish in his enthusiasms and his tastes. When he telephoned her to tell her the news—that Muggsy had sold him to the Red Sox for one hundred and twenty grand, he whooped like a kid.

"I told you I would dress you in ermines and diamonds," he said joyously. "This is it, baby. The depression is over. Get on your glad rags and let's get married tonight."

They did. She demurred, but his enthusiasm swept aside her doubts. The photographers were in on the wedding. The sports writers knew that sixty grand of that sale price went to the pitcher himself. Sixty grand in cash and a pretty wife!

That wasn't so bad for a kid just out of college who had paid his own expenses to training camp the Spring before.

The writers made the most of this rags to riches story.

Their honeymoon was a spree. Niagara Falls, Florida, California.

In California Tex bought a home, a

five-acre ranch in San Fernando Valley.

They furnished it expensively. Forty grand of their stake was gone before Tex realized it. He shrugged his shoulders. He would make more dough. This was just the start.

The orange grove itself would make that back. Plenty of money in oranges.

BETH tried to stay his hand. She didn't want this luxury. The fur coats and the convertible sedan meant little to her. But there was no stopping Tex. All of his life he had dreamed about this. Now that it was here he wasn't holding himself back. Golf clubs, rifles, sports jackets. He had fifteen new sports jackets. He surveyed them proudly and told Beth with a chuckle:

"I buy everyone I see I like. I used to dream about having a different sports coat for every day in the week."

She sighed and surrendered her lips to his kiss. There was nothing she could do about it. And, after all, what difference did it make? There would be more money. He had returned two Sox contracts and had finally badgered \$12,000 out of the office, and a bonus clause. If he won twenty games the next season he would be making as much money as any pitcher in the league.

Tex was just twenty-one. The year before he had graduated from college. For the first time he learned what it means to pay an income tax.

When the public accountant he hired to prepare his return told him what the total payment would be, he was aghast. He couldn't believe it. He carried his papers to another accountant. Their figures differed, but not to any great extent.

Tex Tucker owed Uncle Sam eighteen thousand dollars!

He had that much left, barely. He paid half of it and returned to his San Fernando Valley home and hastily cancelled contracts for planting more orange trees and grape vines, and rebuilding the barn. That would have to wait.

But, of course, there was no occasion for worry. He assured Beth everything would be all right.

"I'll win twenty ball games, honey, and buy you another fur coat," he promised.

She had to smile in spite of her mis-

COULD HAPPEN

Is it possible for a baseball team in its one time at bat in an inning to make six hits, including three triples, and not score a run?

Yes. It could happen, like this:

The first man up triples and is thrown out at the plate trying to stretch it into a homer.

The second batsman does the same thing. The third hitter triples. That's three triples, with two men out.

The next batter singles to the third baseman; next man also singles to the third baseman, who on both plays, after making magnificent stops on balls labeled hits, decides to hold runner on third rather than make a play for the hitter. The next batter then singles and the ball hits a base runner, retiring the side.

This could happen, although it is unlikely that it ever will, because base runners are taught to run on anything with two outs, and infielders are taught to play for the hitter when there are two out.

giving. What could you do with such a husband!

He announced the same thing to the press . . . he had to win twenty ball games. Maybe thirty. There were still more things to buy. And there would be more Tuckers to look after.

The press liked this new Tex Tucker better. He was more of a likeable country boy and less of a bully. They found him even more colorful than the season before. It made good copy that he paid Beth's expenses to training camp; he wouldn't stand even a short separation. He drove around in his cream-colored convertible and bought ice cream cones for droves of worshipping youngsters.

He didn't fare too well in spring training games but no one worried about that; a pitcher who has proved himself doesn't have to win ball games in the spring. He was saving them for the regular season.

As a special favor, he asked Manager Gyp Warren to let him start the first game against the Comets, his old club. Nothing would give him more pleasure than to pitch a shutout against Muggsy.

Warren agreed. This game was played in Boston.

Beth did not like it. "Do you have to drag out that old hostility again?" she demanded. "Honey, it will never die down if you keep dragging it into print."

"I want to pitch against your old man's

club every series this season," Tex avowed.

The sports writers delighted in this family feud. They dug out the Billy Conn episode. And, unexpectedly, they got a rise out of Muggsy.

"Tell Tucker we're ready for him!" he was quoted as saying. "Tell him we got just the formula to reduce swell heads."

The day of the Red Sox-Comet opener there was a packed stand noisily awaiting the umpire's cry of "batter up." Out in the bull pen Tex warmed up confidently. This was his first start and the Sox were topping the league with five straight wins.

When the Comets finished their infield, Muggsy ordered them under the dugout for a conference.

He faced them, narrow eyes blazing.

"This guy is a can of corn," he said abruptly. "Choke up on your bats and punch-hit, don't slug. Watch his shoulders; he can't throw anything but that fast ball without hitching. When he lifts his arms, he's gonna feed you a curve. He ain't got a curve. When you see it coming in, get set and take your cut regardless of the count or where the men are on base. He tips his change of pace with his elbow, throws it kinda stiff-armed. Watch him on the inside corner; he is good at it. Crowd the plate. That's all."

And the little bulldog of the diamond turned and strode out to home plate to talk over ground rules with Gyp Warren. Tex was just going to the mound, flapping his glove against his hip as he walked along. Neither seemed to see the other.

Muggsy came back to the bench with the Boston fans booing him. Levy went toward the plate, swinging two bats over his shoulder. The umpire dusted off the plate and then adjusted his headgear and bellypad. He jerked his thumb to Levy and the crowd greeted the first Comet batter with a roar of disdain.

A girl, sitting in a private box back of third base, trembled. She had seen Muggsy's teams play ball for all the years of her life. She knew that Tex was a great pitcher; she believed him to be one of the greatest in the game.

But she knew her father also. There wasn't another manager like him.

LEVY was crowding the plate. The little shortstop wasn't grinning in his

usual fashion. They loved Muggsy. They knew how Muggsy wanted to win this game. They would win it for him if they had it in them.

Tex tried to move Levy away with a fast ball, head high. The shortstop ducked and was right on top of the plate again. Catcher Pig Appleby didn't call for another duster. He knew Levy; the shortstop wasn't scared. Pig sighed and motioned for the inside pitch.

Tex whipped in his side-arm speed. Levy had his bat ready, gripped a good four inches above the handle. He met the pitch squarely and the horsehide did a dive into short left field for a single.

Muggsy was coaching at third today. He touched the visor of his cap as Parker came up, also crowding the plate.

It was easy to figure that Tex would try to drive Parker back. They could hit him too easily with those choked-up grips.

Levy was off before the pitch, scurrying for second like a rabbit. Tex had given him too much of a lead; he was there. Appleby made the throw but it was a high pitch, aimed at Parker's head, and the catcher was off balance. Levy made the sack with a slide and came up hurling insults at the tall pitcher.

Tex grinned confidently.

Parker stepped out of the box and shot a questioning look at Muggsy, expecting to get the sacrifice sign. But he didn't. He shook his head and crowded the plate again. Tucker's first pitch was too fast for him and he missed it. The second sailed in knee high and inside and he got only a piece of it. Two-one.

Now Parker saw that hitch in the pitcher's shoulder. It was coming, this soft curve. After two fast ones, Tucker figured he was set for a change of pace.

Parker slid his fingers down on the bat and dug in his cleats. The sailer floated up, bobbing off the outside. It was wide of the plate but Parker was ready to hit it and he did. He took a half-step out and lunged at the ball.

Out in right center the sun gardener started tearing backward. But no right fielder could have reached that line drive; it caroomed against the wall and back toward the infield. Parker rounded first and took second standing up, while Levy scored unchallenged.

Tucker's lips were drawn back in a snarl. He whipped in his knee-high fast ball to Bill Armstrong and Armstrong took three swings and out.

Muggsby, watching grimly from the coaching box, shook his head. This kid could throw a ball. Armstrong had been set for that speed, and he was a good .320 hitter who delivered in the clutch. But Tucker had simply blazed the pitches by him.

He wouldn't trust his curve again; he shook off the catcher's signal. And, to Terry Sothoron, he offered five blazing fast balls. Two of them were wide but three were across the outside corner and Terry was called out on strikes.

The fans gave him a cheer. A run, yes, but their rookie idol had come back with two blazing strikeouts. From here on he would have the Comets in the palm of his hand.

Tex, fingering the ball in his glove, surveyed Jumbo Stewart thoughtfully. Already his arm was weakening; he could feel it. But Appleby called for the knee-high fast ball and Tex put it there with everything he had behind it.

Stewart stepped away from the plate to wipe his hands in the dirt. Muggsy came up from third base and the manager talked in low swift words. Jumbo nodded and returned to the plate.

What Muggsy had told him was this: "He can't throw that speed in there all afternoon. Keep set for his curve. Let the fast ones go by."

They were going to wait him out. Stewart let another smoke ball go past. Strike two!

Now Appleby, crouching low in the dirt, called for the curve. The veteran catcher knew his pitcher was weakening. He knew that Tucker was pitching his arm off to hold off the Comet attack.

Stewart was set for the curve. It broke just in front of the plate; Jumbo poked at it with his short grip and pulled it into left field. Parker romped home and the Comets led 2-0.

Jumbo sighed and resumed his crouch in the dust. His glance to the Sox bench was enough; two pitchers went scurrying for the bullpen.

Jumbo called for speed. Tucker couldn't hold out but that wasn't the catcher's

worry. He had to play 'em a batter at a time.

Between innings he talked to Gyp Warren.

"I tell ya, the kid can't make it," he protested to a manager who didn't believe him.

"Not in shape?" asked Warren anxiously, thinking of the pile of cash his owners had surrendered for this tall rookie.

"Maybe," Jumbo said evasively. That wasn't it though. He had never liked Tucker. Jumbo was a catcher of the old school; he didn't like pitchers who couldn't throw everything, a curve especially.

"Well, we'll try him another inning," decided Warren.

He couldn't jerk Tucker right then. The owners wouldn't like it. They had dough tied up in Tucker. And the fans wanted to see Tucker pitch.

But Warren was wrong. Tex didn't last another inning. Three straight singles, a base on balls and a glaring error by the centerfielder sent Lefty Paige out to the mound, and Tex trooping unhappily to the showers.

The 5-0 advantage amassed off Tucker meant the ball game, though Paige was airtight in the last seven frames. The Sox lost 7-3.

Gyp Warren had a good pitching staff. Seven of them were vets and he had bought Tucker only because the owners were throwing all kinds of dough into the team to get a pennant. "A flag at any price" was the Boston motto, and they meant it.

Not until Tucker himself demanded another chance did he send him to the mound again. The Tigers had been his "cousins" the season before; he had handcuffed their heavy hitters time and again.

But not this day. The word had gotten around how Tex could be manhandled. Choke up on his speed, when he hitches his arm, draw back and slug his curve! Make him throw the fast ball and he won't last three innings.

They had his number and this team could hit. When his weak curve wobbled over they swung for the fences and made it. Warren let him take a lot of punishment. He had been studying the rookie's pitching and listening to Jumbo Stewart.

There were four home runs hit in two innings. The score was 7-1 when Gyp

gave up and motioned in Kewpie Smith.

VI

THAT night Gyp dictated to his secretary the orders that assigned Tex to Dallas for further seasoning!

The story leaked out before Gyp talked to the rookie. The first intimation Tucker had of the deal was a telephone call from the papers. He heatedly denied any intentions of going to Dallas or any other bush league town.

He had proved the season before he could pitch in the big leagues. This was discrimination of the worst sort.

More headlines. Now the press was a little critical; they had battled for him once. One or two of the more astute writers dismissed it as just another Tucker howl.

Two days later the Sox management issued its first comment on Tucker's protest to the league commissioner—Herb Sayer.

The rookie need not go to that trouble. In order to avoid a scandal that might reflect upon the operation of the club, the management was giving Tucker his outright release. He was a free agent.

It was put into dignified language, of course. It didn't say that they had talked over Tucker's case and had decided he wasn't worth a stew in the papers. Rather than face any possible unpopular public reaction, they would give him up as a bad deal. They wouldn't even ask waivers.

It was hard for the sports writers and fans to realize, much less Tex himself. A brief six months ago he had been one of the heroes of baseball, now he was out on his ear.

And he had something else—the notice that the second installment of his income tax was due!

He could pay it, but he would have only pocket change left. There was nothing to do but to slap a mortgage against the ranch.

"But don't you worry, honey," he told Beth. "This will work out for the best. I'll demand a bonus before I sign with any club and we'll pocket another small fortune. As soon as everybody realizes this dumb yap, Warren, has actually let me go, they'll be on the telephone and telegraph wires making me offers."

But Beth wasn't so sure. She was even less sure after a secret talk with her father. Muggsy told her the truth; Tucker couldn't pitch big league ball anymore.

"But, Pops," she protested, "he did so well last year. He hasn't lost his stuff."

So Muggsy explained. He had picked the spots for Tex and his side-armed speed.

"I didn't use him in but two day games and he lost both of them," said the Comet skipper. "At night, with his low-ball pitching, he did well. I pitched him in double-headers most of the time, the second game. The first game I was always careful to work a high-ball over-handed pitcher. The opposition was set up for Tucker. And I used him against the Tigers and the Indians a lot because their dynamite boys are high ball hitters."

Beth began to see the light. "You saw a chance to clean up," she accused her

POSITION

An unheralded youngster walked into a training camp for a tryout.

"What do you play?" asked the manager.

"Infield," he replied.

"What position?" asked the manager.

"Stooped over, just like the professionals," the kid explained.

father. "You nursed him along so you could sell him."

"What if I did?" shrugged Muggsy. "My job is to win ball games and to sell players for a profit. Tucker wouldn't sign any other contract but to be sold at the end of the season and to keep half of his purchase price. What else could I do?"

"Nothing, I guess," sobbed Beth.

"I'll take him back," growled Muggsy. "Maybe I owe him a chance. But not at twelve grand or even ten grand. I'll sign him for three thousand the rest of the season, but he'll have to go to Peoria."

"He won't do that, Pops," sighed Beth.

"Then I wash my hands of it."

"Okay, Pops. Thanks anyhow."

She stood up and shrugged her weary shoulders. She dreaded the job of telling Tex how he owed his first year's success as a big league pitcher to her father.

But, at that, she was not prepared for his outburst. "So you're teaming up with your father!" he said angrily.

"I'm doing nothing of the sort. I'm . . ."

His answer was to stalk out.

He meant to return. He came back several hours later, expecting to find her anxious and penitent. But Beth had some of her father's temper.

She wasn't there.

IT took a long time for Tex to realize she was gone. For two days he waited, but no word. A dozen times he fought back the temptation to call her at her father's home. Each time he conquered the impulse.

Then, after two days, he closed the apartment. He would show them—Beth and Muggsy. He would catch on with another big league club and . . .

But none of them were interested. They would sign him if he wanted to do a stretch in the minors first, but he refused that. If he was going to the minors he should sign there, he countered, and demand a cut of the purchase price when the big leagues bought him.

Finally, he did that. He went to Los Angeles, to be near the ranch, now empty and lonesome. Once it had been the most beautiful spot in the world to him; now he couldn't stand the sight of it. It went on the market and was snapped up. Tex invested the proceeds in nearby Hollywood.

There were plenty of beautiful extras there who would agree with him that he was a great pitcher who had been misused by fate . . . as long as he paid the bills.

There was even a job for him in the pictures. He was a good-looking youngster and he was cast in a western role.

That movie contract helped him, though it wasn't one of the higher-priced ones. For, after thirty days, the Los Angeles club cast him loose. He had won one game and lost four.

He shrugged his shoulders when he was handed his release. "To hell with baseball anyhow," he snapped. "I'll stick to the movies where they pay real dough."

And he did manage to make a living. He could ride a horse and he could wear chaps and a sombrero. The horse operas kept him working, and living.

Until March, 1942!

March 7th, 1942!

For his number in the draft was 858, and he could show no dependencies, no

affiliation with a wartime industry and his studio would have laughed if he had asked they give him a letter to his draft board stating he was an essential man.

His director didn't even know his name.

Asked his preference by the Army, Tex signified that he would like service in the air corps ground unit. His record showed experience in a mechanic's shop, so he was assigned to Randolph Field, San Antonio, Texas.

It was a long train ride from California to the "West Point of the Air." Tex rode the day coaches, sleeping only in catnaps, writhing in the dirt and shabbiness one collects in four days on a train. He thought back bitterly to his last long train trip—when he had bought his own ticket and ridden to the training camp of the Comets. Then he had promised himself that never again would he have to ride the day coaches because he didn't have enough money for a Pullman. But here he was back on the cushions.

There were over a hundred of these rookies being assigned to duty at busy overgrown Randolph. Tex marched from the station with them. It was hot and he was tired. The new shoes hurt.

They were fed and then marched out to duty. A wiry sergeant faced them with unfriendly eyes.

"All right, get moving," barked the sergeant. They fell in step behind him. They had ten days of this boot training behind them already; they could march. Across the field they went at double-quick time. There before them, they realized with an awful gasp, was construction work—a concrete sidewalk was being built.

The sergeant brought the squad to a halt with a sharp command.

"How many of you men can use a typewriter?" barked the sergeant.

Tex wished he had the nerve to claim such a talent. Obviously the men who could use a typewriter would go to other jobs, perhaps to an office. But he dared not step forward and volunteer when he couldn't deliver. A score or more rookies claimed to know something about the keyboard. The sergeant nodded.

"All right, you guys get to work pouring that concrete," he ordered.

There was a titter from the men left behind. Tex grinned himself. So the

guys thought they were volunteering for a snap. His grin broadened as the disillusioned privates picked up shovels and went to work.

The sergeant's voice snapped out, and every grin disappeared.

"You guys who can't use a typewriter get in there and help them."

That was the Army, Tex Tucker learned—grim, business-like and yet full of two-fisted humor. He bent his back from the weight of the sand he was feeding the mixer and responded to the corporal's demand that "he get the lead out." "What do you think this is?" demanded the corporal. "This is the Army, not a day and night lodging house."

By afternoon every muscle in Tucker's body ached. His dungarees were soaked with perspiration and streaked with sand. But he kept moving.

He was almost dizzy from fatigue when he heard a voice shout: "Tucker, Jeremiah T. Tucker!"

He raised his head. The same sergeant was back and glaring around accusingly.

"Here," Tex answered weakly.

There was another sergeant there. Tex blinked. It seemed he should know him. The face was familiar. And the gray hair. But yet . . . !

"Fall out, Tucker," rasped the sergeant. "Front and center. We don't call you in this Army just to ask you if you're feeling well."

Tex came forward slowly. The other sergeant held out his hand.

"Glad to see you, Tucker," he said warmly.

Tex shook his hand but still couldn't recall him.

"Corgan, Bill Corgan," explained the sergeant.

NOW Tex remembered him. Bill Corgan had once been a good-hitting, fast-fielding major league outfielder. The season before, when Tucker had been with the Sox, Corgan had coached for the Indians.

"How are you?" he mumbled.

"I'm baseball coach here at the field, Tucker," Corgan explained. "Workouts start at five o'clock. And, boy, how we need pitching!"

The tall Tucker shook his head. "No

dice, Corgan," he said firmly. "I don't pitch except for dough."

Corgan's eyes narrowed. "This is the Army, Tucker," he said quietly. "All Army men play on Army teams."

"Look, Corgan," Tex said impatiently, "my name is Tucker—Tex Tucker. Remember me? I got half of my purchase price out of old tightward Muggsy Miller. I got dough for pitching with the Sox. When this right arm of mine goes to work, somebody pays for it. I don't mind being a soldier at fifty per, but I ain't pitching for that."

"Okay, if that's the way you feel about it. I don't suppose we can force you to play ball."

He turned away. Tex went back to his shovel. The two sergeants walked away.

"I think maybe Mister Tucker will be out for the squad before long," the first sergeant said slowly. "He'll either be out or he will wish to hell he had."

"I was hoping you would feel that way," Sergeant Corgan said with an unpleasant smile.

Sergeant Hobey Bruce started in the very next morning. Tucker went back to the concrete mixing. Tucker worked on the concrete mixer until the sidewalk was finished. Then he was sent to the shops and put to cleaning greasy used plane parts in vats of gasoline. And to scrubbing the shop floors.

"Hey," he finally protested, "I'm a fair mechanic. Anybody can do this kind of work."

"Sure," Sergeant Bruce agreed sweetly. "You can. And you will."

Tex drew himself up to his full six feet two inches. "You wouldn't be trying to ride me, would you, Sarge?" he asked softly.

"It's happened in the Army," was the bland answer.

"Why?" Tex demanded.

"Figure it out for yourself," Bruce shrugged. "Maybe my pal Corgan told me to. Us sergeants stick together, you know."

"I see," Tex said gently. His lips parted in a grimace and he returned to his scrubbing. Well, he would see Bruce and Corgan hanged to the hangar rafters

before he would be coerced into playing baseball.

But fate intervened to settle the issue in favor of Corgan. One day Tex noticed on the bulletin board that the Comets would come to Randolph Field for a three-game exhibition. While he was reading it, he was conscious of another soldier standing behind him. He turned to face Sgt. Corgan.

"Your old chums," grinned the sergeant.

"No friends of mine," snapped Tucker. "I'd give my right arm to pitch against the Comets every day in the week."

"Could you last that long?" countered Corgan. "I saw you when you couldn't stay in the box two innings."

"Nuts to you, Corgan," and he turned on his heels.

Corgan took a step after him. "You can start against them one game if you'll get in shape, Tucker," he called.

Tex took a few more steps without replying, then hesitated. And when one hesitates, he is lost.

"You mean that, Corgan?"

"Sure," shrugged the veteran. "Gotta pitch somebody against them."

"It's a deal," Tex agreed after another moment's hesitation.

"Good," approved the sergeant. "I'll tip off Bruce to lay off you. Can't have my pitchers worked to death."

VII

THERE was a week to get ready for the Comets. Tex found his arm stiff but strong. The heavy work he had done had built up his strength. He wasn't ready to pitch; he knew it. And so did Corgan.

"You'll have to stick to the fast stuff," advised the veteran. "You'd be nuts to try curves with just a week to get ready."

"But," he added with a mirthless grin, "you never had a curve ball anyhow."

Tucker's answer was hot. They would never get along, Corgan and Tucker. But he would pitch against the Comets anyhow.

He threw the ball like Corgan suggested—just lobbing. Then a little harder. Nothing on it, just over the plate. The day before the Comets came to Randolph Field he cut loose with his speed for a few pitches. He had it again. Corgan

watched him blaze a few over and then waved him in.

"Save your arm," advised the sergeant.

For two afternoons Tex sat glumly in the dugout and watched the Comets trounce the Service team. But not too convincingly; Corgan had a good lineup at Randolph Field. A half-dozen were ex-big leaguers. Every time he looked toward Muggsy a lump formed in his throat and he thought about Beth, whom he hadn't heard from.

He did not show himself on the playing field. He knew what he would face from the Comets when he went out; he would spare himself that until he was ready to pitch against them. He worked short sessions in the bullpen both afternoons, his cap pulled low over his eyes. His arm felt good. He had no doubt at all that he could stand the Comets on their ears.

Corgan seemed to sense that he wanted his identity kept secret. The sergeant didn't even announce to the press that he was going to start the third game. As yet there had been no mention in any of the papers that Tucker, the ex-big leaguer, was on the Randolph squad.

Not until five minutes before the game, until the loud speaker blared out the news, did Muggsy know that his ex-protege and son-in-law would pitch.

Muggsy was walking across the diamond when he heard the announcement. The soldier handling the microphone knew his baseball, and likewise liked to dramatize.

"Ladies and gentlemen, starting on the mound this afternoon for the Randolph Field Ramblers will be Tex Tucker, now a private at Randolph Field. You will remember that Tucker broke into big league baseball with the Comets and was sold by Miller to the Sox for \$120,000. You will also remember that Tucker happens to be Muggsy's son-in-law. So this is a family feud today, Tucker against his former manager and father-in-law."

Muggsy listened and then came slowly to the Comet bench and poured himself a drink of water. The boys were silent. After all, this guy was Muggsy's son-in-law.

Muggsy spat out a mouthful of the water and turned to his club.

"All right, boys," he growled, "let's get the bum out of there."

They were glad to hear him say that. Tucker was still a bum in their books. They were glad to know their manager agreed with them.

Now Tucker was walking toward the mound and the fans were giving him an ovation. He was taking his warmup pitches slowly, a confident smile on his face.

The Comets came out from under the dugout. There were no big league umpires here to chase them back under the shelter. They could cut loose with their invectives.

"Well, the old popoff kid!"

"How's the arm, blabbermouth!"

Tucker didn't seem to hear them. He rubbed the ball on his sleeve and stared at his catcher. Levy went ambling up to the plate and, remembering Muggsy's strategy the season before, crouched right on top of it, taking a short grip on his bat.

Tex grinned. He let fly with his fast ball and it singed the hairs of the short-stop's head as he went into the dirt.

Levy came up snarling, waving his bat.

"You cheap bum!" he yelled. "Try that again and I'll cram this bat down your throat."

Tucker stepped off the mound and started out to meet Levy. The Comets edged forward. The Ramblers came out.

For a moment it looked as if a free-for-all was going to start.

Then Tex put his hands on his hips and sneered at his former teammates.

"If you guys want to fight," he snarled, "why don't you join the army?"

Then, to the red-faced Levy. "Get up there, shrimp. And if you crowd the plate, I'll bean you."

Levy went back into the box. One—two—three!

The side-armed pitches sailed by him with plenty of smoke. Levy threw down his bat and went to the water can cursing under his breath.

Muggsy stood on the third base coaching line, his face a mask.

Now Parker. This guy could hit an inside ball. But Tucker had speed today, too much speed. Parker fled out to right center.

And Abraham, Muggsy's highly-touted rookie outfielder, rolled out, pitcher to first base.

Tucker waved to the lantern-jawed man on the coaching line.

"How's that?" he croaked.

Muggsy acted as if he didn't hear.

TEX'S arm had snap to it. What he lacked in conditioning, he had made up in physical strength gained from these long torturous Army days. The Comets got a single in the second and that was all the next two batters went down on strikes.

At the end of the third inning the Ramblers held a 1-0 advantage. Tex had been responsible for the run. He had slammed a double down the left field line to score Henson, who had beaten out an infield hit and gone to second on a sacrifice.

But, going out to start the fourth, Tex wasn't so confident of his ability to keep the Comets subdued. His arm was tiring. He fogged in his fast one and Cunningham slashed a single to left field. Then Rogers doubled to right center.

He didn't try his curve. It wasn't ready. And he knew the Comets could hit his curve ball anyhow. He gritted his teeth and tried to blaze his speed past Joe Gallico. The Italian singled through the box and the second run scored.

Now Corgan stepped out from under the dugout and signalled to the bullpen. Out



came a relief pitcher, and Tex stood on the mound and fingered the ball until his relief arrived. He was glad to see Thompson coming in. A tear was in his squinting eyes as he turned away from the diamond and started toward the showers. Old Muggsy had licked him again.

He could alibi that his arm wasn't in shape after such a long layoff, but he knew that wasn't it. He had his speed; they were just hitting him, that was all.

From the Comet bench came a barrage of taunts.

"There goes old Tucker again!"

"Tucker doesn't stay around long, does he?"

"Tucker doesn't like us any more."

"Hey, Tucker, when are you going to take up mumble-peg?"

Tex had no answer to make. Walking along with his eyes on the ground, he realized for the first time that he was a failure. He had never admitted it before, not even when the Pacific Coast League had bounced him. The next day he would quit the ball club and go back to his concrete mixing and his floor scrubbing.

But he didn't. The Army had other business for him. He climbed on a train and rode the day coaches again. Then he climbed on a boat and he sighed for the comparative luxury and room of a day coach. Then, where he went next, he recalled the comfortable dry middle deck of the troop transport and sighed again.

Finally he found a bed again. It was nothing but a cot, but to him it was the grandest sleeping he had ever experienced. He slept for several fitful days. When he woke up a white-garbed nurse was bending over him and around him there were the moans and the odors of a hospital.

The nurse soothed him. "It's okay, soldier," she said cheerfully. "Just a scratch. You'll be all right."

He was—except for a stiff kneecap. He could walk up the gangplank of the ship that was taking him home.

Yes, home. Tex Tucker was washed up in that league also.

But there were no taunts and jibes as he went out. Instead, as he walked uncertainly and stiffly down the streets of New York, he was occasionally surprised, and embarrassed, when other soldiers, wheeled to a stop and saluted. He was only a cor-

poral and didn't merit such salutes. Or such attention.

But, of course, it wasn't the pair of stripes on his sleeves that attracted their notice—and their respect. It was a pair of ribbons pinned over the shirt pocket of his blouse.

Everywhere he went in America those ribbons caught every eye. For every American can recognize for what they stand, a block away—the Purple Heart and the Congressional Medal of Honor!

There was a rehabilitation camp for Tex, and hundreds of others back from Salerno, who had been fortunate enough to escape with slight wounds but who needed rest, encouragement and help in finding their way back into peace-time occupations.

In charge was a colonel who was a doctor of psychology. These men had spent days under shell-fire. They had carried dead comrades back to camp on their shoulders. They had been pronounced physically fit, but their mental and spiritual condition was something else again.

CORPORAL Tucker would have been shocked had he known the trouble Colonel Blake had gone to before ever talking to him. Colonel Blake knew everything about him, even before he went into the Army. Colonel Blake looked at him across the glass top of his desk and could visualize him as a cocky youngster swaggering into the Comet camp and declaiming to the baseball world that another Dizzy Dean had arrived.

"Corporal Tucker?"

"Yes, sir."

Colonel Blake studied the papers before him. "It is a pleasure and a privilege to know you, Corporal," he said softly. "You must be very proud of your record."

"I'm glad to be back," Tex shrugged. "I can't be too proud of the medals, if that's what you mean. Plenty of other good guys didn't get them, Colonel, who should have."

"I know that's true," the officer agreed.

He read further. "So you used to be a big league pitcher?"

"Yes, sir," Tex admitted, lips tightening.

The Colonel, a trained psychologist, didn't miss the movements of the muscles in the corporal's face. "Any other training?"

"No, sir. You see, Colonel, I decided when I was just a kid that I was going to be a pitcher. I went at it in a business-like way. Not only did I work on my pitching, but I figured how to put on a show for the fans and win a reputation for being colorful. I taught myself a kind of freak delivery—a side-arm pitch—that was different. I had my chance—and muffed it. I threw away the dough I made. I did a little acting out in Hollywood, but I'm not kidding myself about that. I guess the only thing for me to do is to learn more about mechanics. I got a little smattering of that."

"Yes, I suppose so," murmured Colonel Blake. He did not say what he was thinking, that there was nothing about Tucker's injury to keep him from pitching again, even right away. But then few of Blake's problems were ever physical:

His eyes returned to the papers. "I see you were married once, Tucker?"

"Yes," Tex admitted.

Again the officer's sharp eyes did not miss the tightening of Tucker's lips.

He laid down the papers and leaned back in his chair. "Baseball is a great game," he said enthusiastically. "I once had ambitions of playing in the majors myself. Even had a tryout in college ball after doing well in high school. I could run like an antelope, I could field well, and I could hit straight-ball pitching. But when they started throwing curves at me—well, you can't steal first base, can you, Corporal?"

"No way to do that," Tex smiled.

The cagy colonel changed the subject. He had satisfied himself on another point. Tex still loved baseball. Tex would never be happy doing anything else.

"If you haven't any immediate plans, Tucker, how about staying with us a while?" he proposed. "Some of our men used to be baseball players. Nearly all of 'em are baseball fans. There are a bunch of crippled fellows who sit out on the verandah every afternoon for the sun. Most of them heard about you, Tucker. I think they would get a kick out of just seeing you and another ball player play catch. You can show 'em how you throw your side-armed fast ball."

"I haven't got much of a curve," Tex smiled.

Blake's eyes gleamed. This man was a genius at worming a man's story out of him without giving himself away.

"Ever hear of Mike Harris?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. Used to coach the Giants."

"Mike is with us as a captain," said Blake. "I'll get him to work with you. And Bull Snyder, who used to catch for the Reds. I think the fellows would get a kick out of that, Tucker. You would be helping us out a lot."

"I'll be glad to," Tex agreed.

"Of course you're out of the Army, except for the formality of your discharge," the Colonel went on. "I have a little leeway in my budget but not much. Would a hundred and fifty a month and board and room interest you?"

"Just for playing catch?" Tex demanded suspiciously. Like every other returning veteran, he didn't want charity.

"Oh, that and talking to the boys and coaching them," Blake said carelessly. "You'll earn your money, don't worry about that."

Tex agreed eagerly. His long fingers were itching even as he talked to the Colonel. Imagine getting his hands on a baseball again!

The Colonel smiled happily as Tex left his office. There was already a difference in the soldier's attitude.

That afternoon Colonel Blake took time out from his office duties to watch the threesome of Tex Tucker, Bull Snyder and Mike Harris entertain the wounded soldiers. Many of those boys would never walk again. They sat in wheelchairs and followed Tucker's every motion with hungry eyes. The Colonel turned away with a lump in his throat.

Two weeks later he had cause to be in New York on business. By hurrying through his visits with officials, he managed to crowd in a flying trip to the Comet business office. Muggsy Miller met him there by appointment.

"What do you want to see me about, Colonel?" asked the Comet skipper after they had shaken hands and exchanged pleasantries.

"One of your former boys, Muggsy," Blake smiled. "He is now one of my boys. Tex Tucker."

"Yeah, Tucker," Muggsy frowned.

Neither he nor Beth had heard from Tex in over a year.

"I want him back in baseball, Muggsy," the officer said calmly.

"Don't talk to me," Muggsy said harshly.

"Give me his case record," Blake replied. "I know a lot about him already. Tell me why he can't click in big league ball."

"IN the first place," Miller said curtly, "he has a freak delivery. He was nuts on being a showman and taught himself a side-armed pitch. I don't like freak pitching. Yeah, some did it, but not many. Then he ain't got a curve ball or a change of pace. He came storming into my camp acting like he was another Walter Johnson and I signed him to a contract by which he was to get half of the purchase price when I sold him. So I built him up by nursing him along and using him in night games against teams notoriously weak against low-ball pitching. I peddled him for a hundred and twenty grand to the Sox. It was easy to see how to beat him—hug the plate, poke his fast ball for a single, slug his curve when he tipped you off it was coming. He could get by two or three innings on just smoke but that's all. The Sox got wise and let him go. Nobody else wanted him. He proved himself a sorehead and a popoff guy, and they wouldn't give him a tumble. Neither would I if I hadn't seen a chance to make some dough on him."

"I see," Blake murmured. "But he married your daughter, didn't he?"

"Yeah, but that's out," Muggsy snapped. "She has forgotten all about him."

"Has she married again?"

"No."

"Or divorced him?"

"No."

"I think I'll see your daughter, Mr. Miller," proposed the Colonel, standing up.

Muggsy caught his arm. "Look, Colonel, this is no business of yours. That four-flusher has caused enough trouble in my family. Sure my girl is still nuts about him; women love a guy like that until they die. But he ain't got it, Colonel. If he had the moxie I could teach him something about pitching. In the first place, I

could use him as relief right now; he can go for two or three innings. But when a man ain't got it inside, no use to fool with him."

"I differ with you on that, Mr. Miller," Blake said stiffly. "Do you realize the man you are talking about wears the Purple Heart and the Congressional Medal of Honor?"

"Him; Naw!"

"You may take my word for it," Blake snapped. "And to us in the Army—well, I don't want to try to tell you your duty, Mr. Miller. But that boy you say hasn't got the guts to pitch major league ball went into a German machine-gun nest and destroyed it with a hand grenade. Then he picked up his wounded commanding officer and brought him back through five-hundred yards of shell fire limping along on one leg. Perhaps my slant is wrong, but I think we owe something to boys like Tex Tucker. I think you owe him a contract with the Comets!"

"What! Me sign that popoff guy!"

"He backed up his popping-off in a tougher league than you ever played in," Blake said warmly.

Muggsy looked off. "I was in France," he said tersely. "The Argonne."

"Then you know what I mean," Blake said quickly.

"Yeah, I know what you mean," Muggsy growled.

He was silent a moment, then his narrow eyes under the heavy eyebrows came back to the Colonel.

"I wouldn't give a damn if it wasn't for my girl," he said pensively. "I'll throw away a little dough and won't care . . . 'cause I'm here right now because a soldier carried me out of the Argonne. I was his lieutenant and he packed me down the hill. I wouldn't care much if we lose a ball game. But my girl . . . that's different."

"I can promise you that won't worry you, Mr. Miller," the Colonel assured him. "I don't know if Tucker can pitch big league ball or not; that isn't my department. But there is nothing about him—today—that would make him an unwelcome son-in-law. In fact, I wouldn't mind having him for a son myself."

"He's gotta change his attitude," mum-

bled Muggsy. "He's gotta pitch like I tell him."

"I think he will," predicted Blake.

They parted with a handshake, and the signing of a blank contract. There was no salary filled in at the Colonel's request.

Then the officer caught a plane back to the camp. He could hardly wait to see Tex.

He found the tall youth and his two veteran companions engaged in a pepper game for the amusement of the wounded soldiers.

The Colonel stepped forward and interrupted the show.

"Sorry, boys," he smiled to the invalids.

"But I have news for Tucker."

Then, with a sudden burst of genius: "You'll be interested in it, too," he announced. He took the contract from his pocket. "This is a contract for Tex Tucker," he informed them. "Tex is going back to the majors where he belongs."

Cheers rang out from the veterans.

"Attaboy, Tucker."

"Good going, Tucker."

Tex stared at the folded sheet of paper as if he couldn't believe his own eyes.

"For me?" he whispered. "A big league contract. Who with?"

"Does it matter?" countered the Colonel.

"No," Tex answered after a moment.

"It doesn't matter."

"Even Muggsy Miller?"

Tex raised his head and for a second there was that old defiant gleam in his eyes and the old snarl to his lips. Then his expression changed, and he grinned.

"I'm glad it is Muggsy," he said softly. "I guess that sour-faced so-and-so is the best manager in baseball."

"I'm sure he is," Blake said earnestly. "He'll give you a square deal, Tucker. Make the most of it."

VIII

TUCKER was ready to leave. He had planned upon going by train but, when he went in to tell Colonel Blake goodbye, there was a pilot waiting in the outside office.

"I'm Captain Earnest," the flier introduced himself. "I'm flying you to New York."

Blake came out and added a few words. "You're one of the first boys to come back, Tucker," said the officer. "You are carrying a responsibility with you. You'll find everybody pulling for you. We want you to make good from the start. We want to tell these other men who come here: 'look at Tex Tucker; he went right back into the big leagues and he was better than he ever was.' You can't flop with a responsibility like that, Tucker."

"No, I can't," Tex agreed. He held out his hand. "So long, Colonel," he murmured. "And thanks."

"Thank me with pitching," said the officer. "And Muggsy wants the same display of gratitude."

Captain Earnest set him down at Mitchell Field shortly after noon and a taxi quickly whirled him to the stadium.

It suddenly occurred to Tex that he was riding right into the midst of a red-hot pennant fight. He had followed the baseball news, yes, but he hadn't thought much about it until now. Muggsy, bringing up youngsters from nowhere and patching his lineup with castoffs, was right in the middle of the flag scramble, a game behind the pace-setting Sox.

Tex chuckled at his own nervousness. His hand was trembling until he could hardly hold the money to pay the taxi driver. Then into the dressing room, very hesitantly.

The door to Muggsy's office was half-open, indicating the manager was inside.

Tex knocked timidly outside.

"Yeah? The door's open. Use it."

He went inside and waited silently until Muggsy looked up from his desk. Muggsy's eyes burned, then a film covered them.

"Hello, Tucker," he said casually. "Ready to suit out?"

"Yes."

"How's your arm?"

"Fine. I've been working out for a month."

"Good. We need pitchers. Thompson is whining about a sore arm and Newell is in a slump. See Edwards about a suit."

Tex knew where to go to find Edwards, the secretary. His white flannel suit, shoes and jersey over his arm, he approached the dressing room gingerly. This was the club that had chased him out of the big

time. It was hard to walk in as casually as if nothing had happened.

Inside he could hear the players laughing and chattering. He hesitated a moment, then pushed open the door. Immediately the din was silenced and every eye turned in his direction.

"Well, boys, the prodigal is back," Tex grinned. "Anybody got a fatted calf?"

There was no answer. They looked at him strangely. Then they exchanged startled glances. Evidently Muggsy hadn't told them that he was bringing back Tucker for another trial.

"Hello, Tucker," Levy said weakly, avoiding a direct look.

That was all there was—except strained silence. Tex found himself an empty locker and donned his uniform. He was the last one dressed and went onto the field alone. They were tossing the ball back and forth and none offered to join Tucker in a game of catch. He sat down on the bench and made himself practically invisible behind the shelter of the water can. Tex Tucker, who had swaggered into this same park with boasts on his lips three years before, felt suddenly humble and unsure of himself.

None of the Sox saw him. One or two of the Comets softened up with nods as they came by for drinks. Muggsy came into the dugout after a few minutes and motioned to Tucker.

"In the bullpen, Tucker," he said curtly.

"You think you might use me today?" Tex gasped.

There was such a difference between this Tex Tucker and the old one that Muggsy was startled. He stared down at the youth in disbelief and then walked by him shaking his head.

Tex trooped toward the bullpen in deep right field.

This was a money series with blue chips on the line and the stadium was almost packed with baseball-mad fans glorying in the first pennant chance in which the Comets had figured in a long time. Lefty Warmouth was warming up in the bullpen, and the short squatty Julian Vega was catching.

Warmouth gave him a curt nod and that was all. But Vega came forward to shake his hand warmly.

"Ah, Señor Tucker. Glad you weeth us,

amigo. Julian take you and we win ball games, si?"

"I hope so, Vega," Tex smiled, glad for the friendly hand.

"Julian read about your medal," beamed the Cuban. "Si, one of my amigos, I tell everybody."

The tall Warmuth shot Tex a curious glance. "You get in the war, Tucker?"

"Some," Tex said tersely.

THE game was on. Bill Prewitt was starting against the heavy-hitting Sox, and they were hitting him. But two running catches in the outfield shut off the visitors without a run and the Comets trooped in for their first turn at bat.

"We'll have to work," Warmouth said in disgust. "When Prewitt ain't got it in the first inning, he never has."

Vega stepped back a little farther and they began to put more on their throws.

Dilly Carter was working for the Sox and he had his stuff with him. He had won 23 ball games the previous season and Boston usually had him in there when the heat was on. The Comets could pull up within a half-game if they copped this one and the Sox weren't taking chances. Tex could see Gyp Warren pacing up and down in front of the dugout like an impatient father stalking the hospital corridors.

A run off Prewitt, a solid smash into the bleachers. Two men on base, an error and a walk. But he got by that inning.

"I'll have to go the next frame," Warmouth confided to Tex.

Tucker nodded anxiously. He had been with the Comets for only a day but already he had the pennant fever. Already this was *his* ball club. He had never felt that way before. It occurred to him suddenly that he and Muggsy had not even discussed salary terms. He smiled ruefully, recalling their first conversation, and his first contract.

The Comets came back and knotted the score at one-one. Little Levy stole home with two out, diving under the catcher's legs and upsetting him.

"That's ball playing," Warmouth observed.

Tex nodded happily. This was the kind of ball club to be on, when a little guy

would dive into a two hundred pounder just for a run.

Then the Sox. Could those guys hit. Center-fielder Riley pulled one down off the wall but there were two singles in a row and Warmouth started moaning.

"I don't mind working," he confided to Tex. "I don't give a damn if my arm drops off. But Muggsy oughta have some other fireman. I can't do relief work every day."

But, as the jittery Prewitt walked Pete Brewer to fill the bases, Warmouth let out a stream of curses and started toward the playing field.

Tex stopped throwing and looked toward the diamond. Muggsy Miller had stepped out of the dugout and was waving to Vega.

"No, Warmouth," gasped the catcher. "Senor Miller does not want you. He want Tucker."

"Me!" gulped Tex.

"Si, senor," chortled Julian, rubbing his mitt. "You and Julian, amigo. Go and throw to Climmons; Julian get his pads on."

Tex still hesitated. Warmouth gripped his arm. "You were a poof-out guy once, Tucker, and we hated your guts," he growled. "Deliver now and we'll love you the rest of our lives."

Tall Tex Tucker nodded and started walking toward the diamond. It seemed a mile out there . . . a long mile. He walked slowly. Calm yourself, son. This is just a ball game. You've pitched them in this park before and you've won them.

Then he heard the loud speaker above him, and the words resounding from one packed bleacher to the other:

"Ladies and gentlemen, coming in to pitch for the Comets is Tex Tucker, holder of the Purple Heart and the Congressional Medal of Honor, veteran of Sicily and Salerno, just given his medical discharge by the United States Army!"

Tex raised his eyes at the applause. He gulped and he lowered his eyes again.

THIRTY-THREE thousand fans had come simultaneously to their feet and were giving him a standing ovation!

Colonel Blake's words rang in his ears above the din. "Other guys are depending on you to show them the way. You're the first one back. We want to tell 'em: 'Look

at Tex Tucker; he came back and went right into the big leagues and stuck."

He stumbled into something and he knew he had reached the mound. Someone thrust the ball into his hand. It was Levy, the little fire-eating shortstop.

"We're back of you, Tex, son," sang out the little pepper-pot. "Just fog 'em in; we'll do the rest."

Now he could see the catcher's dim shape. He took his warmup throws. Vega was ready and came rolling out to the mound.

"Right in the mitt, senor. Hit ze mitt, Remember like we used to do."

And then Julian was crouching low behind the plate and Chip Conway was up for the Sox, determination written on his swarthy face.

And, in a box back of third base, a slim girl sat quivering, gripping her hands until they were white.

It was a ball. It was wild. It was into the dirt and Julian Vega stopped it with a desperate leap. The horsehide came back. Tex took off his glove and wiped his sweaty hands on it. Then a touch of the resin bag.

Ball two. High outside.

It wasn't a wild pitch but he had been trying to pitch low and inside. Again he fingered the resin bag. Again he looked around him.

Now his vision was clearing. Now he could see the faces above him. Now he could look toward the Comet bench and see Muggsy chomping his tobacco. Now he could look at the runners on the bags and smile disdainfully as they danced off the bases in an effort to confuse him.

Now he could take his windup and . . .

Conway took it. It was baseball to take it. A new pitcher, two wild pitches.

The umpire's right hand went up. A yell came from the stands.

This was in there too. Conway took a swing. Tex dived for the ball but it was by him. He fell on his side from the leap and looked despairingly over his shoulder.

His heart almost stopped beating. Levy had it! The little shortstop had charged the low line smash, snatched it up on the short hop and there was the throw to home, low and like a bullet. Vega took it on his ankles and the runner smashing in

collided with the bury Cuban and went slithering off while the umpire jerked him out.

One gone. No score.

Tex could smile now. After that!

He could grin and he could fog that side-arm smoke ball through.

Strike one!

Strike two!

Strike three!

And there was Gib Hurt slamming his bat into the dust, stalking back to the bench in disgust.

And Tim Hallihan coming up for his turn at bat. Hallihan met the first pitch and lofted it high into the air. Tex started toward the bench without looking backward. A ball club like this wouldn't muff a cinch out like that.

The roar of the stands told him the fly had been caught. And the applause was falling around him like hailstones on a tin roof. He grinned and wondered if the boys at the rehabilitation center were listening in and if the Colonel was . . .

Muggsy gave him a nod. The boys on the bench leaped up to give him a seat.

Little Levy slapped big Matt Pearson, the first batter up, on the shoulder: "Get on, Pearson. Let's get the big pitch some runs. We don't wanna let him down."

Pearson got on. And the surprising Comets pushed two runs across the plate.

Tex walked back to the box with some of his old self-confidence. He fogged in his low balls and the Sox hit them into the hands of his infield. Two innings, three.

And the Comets added a run in the six. It was 6-3 now. If they held it they were only a half-game behind.

Then, in the seventh, Tex saw two consecutive line drives sail over his head for singles. He frowned. His speed was still there, but they were just hitting him. Vega came out to talk to him,

"We gotta throw something else, amigo," panted the catcher. "The speed, they are on to it."

Tex nodded. They were. For the time being he was just a freak delivery specialist, as Muggsy had said. For the time being he was just a three-inning pitcher. They could use him, yes. Then, in the times to come, when Muggsy had taught him a curve and a change of pace . . .

He turned and waved out to the bullpen where the lanky Warmouth was still throwing 'em. Then, without waiting for a signal from the bench, he folded his glove, jammed it into his pocket and started for the bench.

Muggsy met him half-way. "They got my number, Muggsy," Tex explained. "You were right, I gotta pick up some more stuff."

"That won't take long, Tucker," Muggsy said warmly. "Gimme any guy with the guts that you have and I can make a pitcher out of him."

Now Warmouth was blazing his high southpaw fast ones. The change of pace was too much for the Sox. Two of them went down swinging. Another lifted a short fly to second base.

So intent was Tex Tucker upon watching that he didn't notice Muggsy had sat down on the bench beside him.

"You got the team spirit, Tucker," the lantern-jawed manager murmured. "Don't you worry about that curve. I'll have you break their backs by next season."

Tex nodded happily.

Then, shifting his cud of tobacco from one jaw to the other, Muggsy said awkwardly:

"Beth is in my box down by third base. You might watch the rest of the game from there."

And the ovation he received there was the one that thrilled him most.

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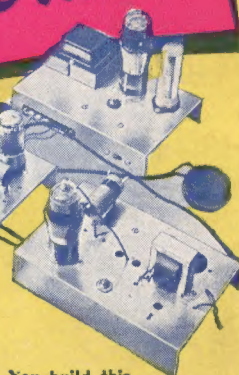
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